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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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QUOTE of THE DAY

If BJP and NDA come to power, its evils will be beyond our imagination. Tamil Nadu must not turn into a land of violence like Uttar Pradesh or Manipur...if they come to power, they will not hesitate to even change Tamil Nadu's name to Dakshin Pradesh

—MK STALIN,
Tamil Nadu CM

>>>MORE ON PAGE 5

Parl passes CAPF Bill, Opposition walks out

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

The Rajya Sabha on Wednesday passed the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026, with a voice vote, amid an Opposition walkout. The legislation aims to create a unified legal framework for personnel across the five CAPFs, replacing separate service rules. It reserves senior leadership positions for IPS officers on deputation, including 50 per cent of Inspector General posts, at least 67 per cent of Additional Director General posts, and all Special DG and DG roles.

The bill follows the Supreme Court's May 2025 ruling recognising CAPF Group A officers as Organised Group A Services and directing progressive reduction of IPS deputation and a cadre review. Retired CAPF officers have protested, arguing that external appointments demoralise cadre officers and slow promotions. Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said the bill strengthens the security and federal structure. Opposition leader Mallikarjun Kharge called for a select committee review and walked out amid sloganeering.

FCRA Bill put on hold

The Centre also put the Foreign Contribution Amendment Bill, 2026, on hold after protests in Parliament and concerns from Christian groups in Kerala. Introduced on 25 March, the bill was criticised as "draconian," giving the government sweeping powers over NGOs and minority-run institutions. Church leaders warned that schools, hospitals, and charities built with foreign donations could come under government control. BJP-led government faced a dilemma ahead of Kerala Assembly polls balancing party stance with potential backlash from Christian. —*PTI*

>>>*More on Pages 3 & 5*

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla conducts proceedings in the House during the second part of the Budget session of Parliament on Wednesday —*PTI*

Jet fuel rate up 8.5%, comm LPG by ₹ 195

ATF hiked 115% for non-scheduled carriers

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) for domestic airlines was increased by a calibrated 8.56 per cent on Wednesday, following an initial proposal of a 115 per cent hike driven by surging global oil prices amid the West Asia conflict.

The government intervened to limit the spike, with domestic carriers now paying Rs 1,04,927 per kilolitre, up from Rs 96,638. Non-scheduled, charter, and foreign airlines face the full 114.5 per cent rise to Rs 2,07,341 per kilolitre. This is the first time ATF prices have crossed the Rs 2 lakh per kilolitre mark.

The price rise adds to airlines' operational strain, as fuel accounts for around 40 per cent of costs, especially on longer Western routes. ATF prices in India have been deregulated since 2001 and revised monthly based on international benchmarks.

Commercial LPG cylinders, used by hotels and restaurants, were also hiked by Rs 195.50 per 19-kg cylinder to Rs 2,078.50, reflecting a 44 per cent jump in Saudi contract prices and supply disruptions via the Strait of Hormuz. Domestic cooking gas LPG rates remain unchanged at Rs 913 per 14.2-kg cylinder.

Select premium petrol and diesel were revised, with XP100 petrol up Rs 11 to Rs 160 per litre and 'Extra Green' diesel up Rs 1.50 to Rs 92.99. Regular, unbranded petrol and diesel remain unchanged at Rs 94.77 and Rs 87.67 per litre in Delhi.

The Petroleum Ministry said only a partial increase of 25 per cent on ATF's base price was passed to airlines, with the difference due to taxes and levies. Oil PSUs continue to absorb under-recoveries to shield consumers, with cumulative losses estimated at Rs 40,484 crore by end-May. —*PTI*

This is the first time ATF prices have crossed the Rs 2 lakh per kilolitre mark. —*FREEPIK*

Will leave Iran in 2-3 weeks: Trump

Says will return if needed; Iran says no truce

WASHINGTON, 1 APRIL

President US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that the American military could end its offensive in Iran within "two to three weeks" and could return for "spot hits" if needed, claiming Tehran had requested a ceasefire.

Speaking at the White House, Trump stated, "We'll be leaving very soon. I would say within two weeks, maybe three. We knocked out a tremendous amount of missile-making facilities."

Iran, however, rejected the claim. Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei called Trump's remarks "false and baseless," while the Revolutionary Guard issued a statement asserting that the Strait of Hormuz "is firmly and decisively under the control" of its forces. The Strait, a key global oil route through which at least a fifth of the world's oil passes, has been effectively closed since US and Israeli airstrikes on Iran began.

Trump previously told allies to "go get your own oil" from the Strait and suggested he could end the conflict without securing it, after threatening to take over Kharg Island. Later, Trump posted on Truth Social that Iran's President of the "new regime," whom he described as "much less radicalised," had requested a ceasefire. He added, "We will consider (it) when Hormuz Strait is open, free, and clear. Until then, we are blasting Iran into oblivion or back to the stone ages."

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi earlier said Tehran was not seeking diplomatic talks, noting that "the trust level is at zero." It is unclear why Trump referred to the President as "new," as Masoud Pezeshkian has held the post since before the war began.

Separately, Saudi-funded outlet Iran International reported that the IRGC) has become the de facto ruler of Iran, blocking Pezeshkian's appointments, though this could not be independently verified.

Trump is scheduled to address the nation at 9 pm EST (6.30 am IST Thursday), signalling a potentially major announcement on the conflict. —*Agencies*

>>> *More on Pgs 4,5,6 &7*

US report flags high import duties in India

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

The US has reiterated that India maintains "high" import duties on a range of goods, including agricultural products, pharmaceuticals and alcoholic beverages, along with various non-tariff barriers. India has always maintained that its duties are in compliance with the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). According to the US Trade Representative's 2026 National Trade Estimate (NTE) Report on foreign trade barriers, released on 31 March, given the large disparity between WTO bound and applied rates, India has considerable flexibility to change tariff rates for both agricultural and non-agricultural products at any time, creating tremendous uncertainty for US workers, farmers, ranchers, and exporters. —*PTI*

>>>MORE ON PAGE 5

K'taka draft policy curbs phone addiction

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

The Karnataka government on Wednesday unveiled a draft policy designed to address the growing concerns around excessive and unsafe digital technology use among students, with a strong focus on mental health, cyber safety, and responsible digital behaviour through a structured school-based framework. Key directives proposed include issuing state-level guidelines to schools, implementing teacher training programmes for healthy technology use, and strengthening school communication with parents. The policy also mandates curriculum integration, where digital wellness will be embedded into life skills and ICT education, covering social media literacy, ethical technology use, and cyber safety. —*PTI*

>>>MORE ON PAGE 2

Putin likely to visit Delhi for BRICS summit in Sept

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to attend the BRICS summit in India this September, Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko said in Colombo on Wednesday. Rudenko added that Moscow would back New Delhi's efforts to forge consensus among members and would honour all existing oil contracts, despite Russia's gasoline export ban from April 1, 2026, due to price fluctuations. Acknowledging challenges within the 10-nation grouping, including Iran and the United Arab Emirates, Rudenko noted that members have differing national priorities, requiring systematic coordination to protect their interests. President Putin had earlier visited India on 4-5, 2025 December. —*PTI*

19 tribunals to decide on SIR in WB: SC

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Nineteen appellate tribunals headed by former chief justices and high court judges will decide on the pleas of those excluded from the voter list in West Bengal, the Supreme Court said.

The court said the tribunals will also adjudicate upon the pleas of Election Commission (EC) officials, who may be aggrieved by the inclusion of persons in the voter list by adjudicating authorities, including 700 judicial officers from West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand.

The apex court took note of two communications received from the chief justice of the Calcutta High Court, updating the progress of the exercise.

Highlighting the "extraordinary exercise" of adjudicating the objections in the ongoing SIR process, the court said approximately 47.4 lakh objections out of a total of 60 lakh were disposed of as on 31 March. Till date the disposal has crossed 47,30,000.

The court said the chief justice of the high court has also highlighted the issue of alleged non-availability of "reasons" for the rejection of the objections by the adjudicating authority. EC assured that the tribunals will have access to the records of the parties before the judicial officers while deciding on the appeals against exclusion or inclusion from the voter list. —*PTI*

Bus rams into many at Haveri stand, kills 2-year-old boy

HAVERI, 1 APRIL

Panic spread at a busy bus stand in Karnataka's Haveri after a Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) bus suddenly rammed into passengers waiting for their bus, killing a 2-year-old child and injuring three others.

The deceased child, Hazrath Ali, was a resident of Savanur town.

Eyewitnesses said that the bus sped into the crowd suddenly, leaving people with little time to react. The horrifying incident as described by locals, was captured on CCTV cameras installed at the bus stand.

Ali, who sustained grievous injuries, was immediately rushed to KIMS Hospital in Hubballi. Despite efforts by doctors, the child could not be saved. Three others were injured in the accident and are currently undergoing treatment at the district hospital. The injured, Vasudev, 44, Harsha, 6 and Kavyanjali, 39 are residents of Bankapur town. The incident has sparked anger among locals, who allege that the negligence of the bus driver led to the tragedy. The people have demanded stringent action against the driver and the conductor. —*PTI*

CCTV footage shows bus ramming into crowded stand; Eyewitnesses say it sped in suddenly, leaving little time to react —*SCEENGRAB*

BLAST OUTSIDE BJP OFFICE IN C'GARH; NIA RUSHED IN

CHANDIGARH, 1 APRIL

A blast outside Punjab BJP headquarters here Wednesday evening sent people panicking, with police saying a "crude" device appeared to have been hurled. No casualties were reported.

A team of the National Investigation Agency was at the site to investigate the blast, which occurred at around 5 pm, a police officer said. A scooter parked outside the building in Sector 37 suffered damage in the blast.

The party's state media cell head Vineet Joshi Joshi, who heard the blast, said, "How did it take place? We could see some signs on the boundary wall.." He told reporters, "It is a matter of concern if a blast took place outside the party office." The area also houses Law Bhavan and a petrol pump. —*PTI*

Bengaluru set for iconic Karaga procession

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

The City gears up for the 'Bengaluru Karaga,' one of its oldest and most iconic festivals, with a grand procession on Wednesday night.

Rituals began at the historic Sri Dharmaraya Swamy Temple in Thigalarpet, where devotees lit several camphor blocks. The festival, which started on 24 March, will culminate in the Karaga Shaktyotsava procession, featuring a priest dressed in female attire balancing a flower-decked pyramid (Karaga) on his head, symbolising Goddess Draupadi, while visiting local temples on Wednesday night.

Celebrated by the Tigala community, the festival draws large crowds. The Bengaluru Central City Corporation has arranged decorative lighting, pothole repairs, cleanliness drives, and health teams, while traffic police have imposed restrictions around the temple and procession route. —*PTI*

Camphor lit in ritual ahead of Bengaluru Karaga procession at Dharmaraya Temple on Wednesday —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

SELF-ENUMERATION

Here's how you can fill Census details online

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

As India prepares for Census, the government has introduced a self-enumeration process that allows citizens to submit their household details online. This is to make the process faster, more accurate and convenient.

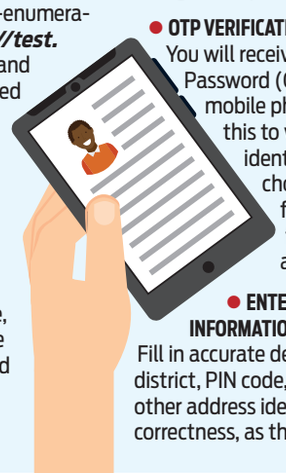
In Karnataka, the self-enumeration window will remain open from 1 to 15 April.

The first phase of the census will include 33 questions covering demographic and household details such as family, consumption patterns and living conditions.

A SIMPLE STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

- **VISIT THE OFFICIAL PORTAL**
Go to the Census self-enumeration website ***(https://test.census.gov.in/se/)*** and locate the section titled "How to do Self Enumeration". Select your State/UT and enter the captcha code to proceed.

- **REGISTER HOUSEHOLD DETAILS**
On the welcome page, enter the name of the head of the household and a valid mobile number. An email ID may also be added, though it is optional.



- **OTP VERIFICATION**
You will receive a One-Time Password (OTP) on your mobile phone. Enter this to verify your identity, then choose your preferred language from the available options.

- **ENTER ADDRESS INFORMATION**
Fill in accurate details such as district, PIN code, locality and other address identifiers. Ensure correctness, as this will be used for verification later.

- **FILL THE CENSUS**
Provide complete information about all household members, including demographic, social and economic details.

- **SUBMIT AND GENERATE ID**
After completing all sections, submit the form. A unique Self-Enumeration ID will be generated and sent to you.

- **DURING ENUMERATOR VISIT**
When the census official visits your home, share this ID. The enumerator will cross-check your details and confirm the data for official inclusion.

Nursing Council Registrar held for sexual harassment

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

A registrar of the Karnataka State Nursing Council in Bengaluru was arrested after allegations of sexual harassment at work place, police said on Wednesday. The action comes following a complaint filed by a female colleague at Upparpet Police Station here on 26 March, they said. In her complaint, the woman stated that the registrar was sexually harassing her. "Based on her complaint, we registered an FIR at Upparpet Police Station. Later, a notice was issued to him, but when he did not respond, we took him into custody yesterday (Tuesday) and produced him before the court," said Yathish N, Deputy Commissioner of Police (West). The investigation is currently continuing under the court's supervision.—*PTI*

MB Patil pushes for B'luru–Vijayapura express train

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Infrastructure Development Minister MB Patil urged the Centre to launch an express train service between Bengaluru and Vijayapura. The demand comes following the completion of the 9.60-km double-line railway work between Alamatti and Wandal, which has been open for traffic since 25 March, the Minister's office said in a statement on Wednesday. In the letter to Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and Minister V Somanna, Patil requested that the line was taken up on priority as thousands of people travel to the City from Vijayapura and Bagalkot and the express could reduce travel time by 10 hours. —*PTI*

Govt launches awareness campaign for Census self-enumeration

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

The State government on Wednesday launched an awareness campaign for Census 2027 Self Enumeration, urging citizens to complete their details online and cooperate fully with enumerators during the upcoming house listing operations.

The Self Enumeration process will start from 1 April and continue till 15 April, 2026, enabling residents to submit their Census details through the official portal, a statement issued by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's Office said.

The campaign highlights a simple digital process, including login through mobile number and OTP, selecting a location, marking the house on the map, filling in household details, and generating a Self Enumeration reference ID.

Alongside the announcement, the CMO released an animation video featuring two characters, Pragati and Vikas, depicted as Census enumerators, who appeal to citizens to provide information willingly and accurately.

In the video, the characters say, "We are Pragati and Vikas, and we stand for Progress and Development," while urging people to share information wholeheartedly.

"The information you provide to me will become the foundation for the country's development," the animation characters say in the video.

"These statistics will form the basis for future planning. Only when every individual cooperates does the country move forward. Our Census, our development," the video concludes.

Field verification is scheduled between 16 April and 15 May. —*PTI*

Govt unveils draft to tackle phone addiction in students

Schools must define screen-time norms, limit it to 1 hour

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

The Karnataka government on Wednesday unveiled a draft policy designed to address the growing concerns around excessive and unsafe digital technology use among students, with a strong focus on mental health, cyber safety, and responsible digital behaviour through a structured school-based framework.

The draft policy, prepared by the Department of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with National Institute of Mental Health and Neurological Sciences (NIMHANS) and other stakeholders, highlights the increasing prevalence of problematic internet use among adolescents and its adverse impact on their well-being, including anxiety, sleep disturbances, poor academic performance, and social isolation.

"With nearly one in four adolescents showing signs of problematic internet use, the policy recognises the rising burden of mental health issues such as anxiety, sleep disturbances, poor academic performance, and social isolation linked to excessive screen time," the document notes.

KEY PROPOSALS

- Teachers to be trained to detect behavioural and academic red flags
- Parents and schools should encourage "tech-free" periods
- Digital wellness should be integrated into curriculum

ROLES FOR ALL

- Students must have responsible digital behaviour and seek help
- Teachers will integrate digital wellness and monitor student well-being
- Parents are to supervise and regulate technology use at home

- Government will provide guidelines, funding, and oversight

"You also must be noticing family members converse less with each other due to mobile phones. They are disturbing our social structure," Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Roa told press.

Key proposals include issuing State-level guidelines for schools, implementing teacher training programmes, and strengthening school-parent communication. Digital wellness will be embedded into life skills and ICT curricula, covering social media literacy, ethical technology use, and cyber safety.

Each school will be required to formulate its own digital use policy, including defining screen-time norms, capped at one hour per day for recreational use. Schools must also address cyber misconduct and ensure access to counselling support.

Teachers will be trained to identify early signs of digital distress and refer students to mental health services through structured mechanisms. Digital Wellness Committees will be set up in schools to oversee implementation, alongside regular sensitisation programmes for students, teachers, and parents.

The policy also promotes offline activities such as physical exercise, hobbies, and designated "tech-free" periods. Monitoring systems will track digital distress and provide access to support services, including Tele-MANAS.

A structured Training of Trainers model under a 'digital detox' framework will equip teachers to understand technology addiction using the 5C model—Craving, Control, Compulsion, Coping, and Consequences—and enable peer-led interventions.

Recognising parents as key stakeholders, the policy encourages device-free zones at home and responsible digital behaviour. It outlines roles for all stakeholders and aims to improve digital literacy, reduce addiction, enable early intervention, and create safer digital environments. —*PTI*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah with Congress Davangere candidate Samarth Mallikarjun, on Wednesday —*X @SIDDARAMAIAH*

Guarantees will help Congress win bypolls: CM

DAVANGERE, 1 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday expressed confidence that Congress candidates will win both the Bagalkot and Davangere South assembly bypolls by a huge margin due to the five guarantee schemes.

"Our guarantee schemes ('Shakti', 'Gruha Lakshmi', 'Gruha Jyoti', 'Yuva Nidhi' and 'Anna Bhagya') are helping us," Siddaramaiah said in Davangere when campaigning for Congress candidate Samarth Mallikarjun. He had been campaigning for Umesh Meti in the Bagalkot segment for the last two days.

"The BJP opposed guarantee schemes because they are programmes for the poor and they always oppose such initiatives," he added. Siddaramaiah said the guarantees benefit people irrespective of their language, caste or religion.

Noting that there are two types of economic theory -- trickle-down economics and universal basic income -- the CM said, "We believe in universal basic income theory because Basavanna, Ambedkar, Gandhiji, among others, wanted the focus to be on eliminating the sufferings of the last man."

He said that the BJP was making false claims against the guarantees for political gain. "Karnataka's economy is strong and stable."

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said: "In Davangere, cutting across party lines, thousands of workers have joined the Congress party. All minorities will vote for the Congress."

Bypolls for the Bagalkot and Davangere South Assembly constituencies will be held on 9 April. The polls were necessitated following the deaths of Congress MLAs HY Meti and Shamanur Shivashankarappa, respectively. —*PTI*

AUTOS SCRAMBLE FOR FUEL

A massive line of autorikshaw outside an LPG bunk at Nagarbhavi, in Bengaluru, on Wednesday. Drivers feared that there would be a shortage of LPG soon as the price increased by Rs 10 —*MOHAMMED ASAD*

GBA TO PREPARE PLAN TO DEVELOP KR MARKET

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Greater Bengaluru Authority Chief Commissioner Maheshwar Rao on Wednesday directed officials to prepare an action plan for the comprehensive development of KR Market.

During his visit to KR Market, he stated that a detailed action plan should be prepared covering proper waste disposal, installation of CCTV cameras, concreting of internal roads, providing proper connectivity to the flower market, and other development works.

Rao directed officials to submit a report within one week along with a clear timeline for completion of these works, a statement said.

In addition, Rao noted that the internal roads in the market are in poor condition and said they should be repaired and a concrete layer be laid. At the KR market junction, asphalting work has been completed, and the service road has been developed with concrete, it said. —*PTI*

GRAVE OF SHIVAMOGGA BOY KILLED IN COMMUNAL TENSION VANDALISED

SHIVAMOGGA, 1 APRIL

The grave of Sanketh, a boy who was recently murdered in Shivamogga, has been vandalised by miscreants.

Sanketh, was killed on 23 February by members of another community. The murder sparked communal tensions in the region.

He had been laid to rest near the Guddemaradi temple at Uragadur. His family members, who used to offer prayers at the grave every Wednesday, were shocked to find the granite slab and photo of him allegedly broken by miscreants. They have filed a complaint at the Tunganagar police station.

"My son was not spared even after death," said Kumar, the boy's father.

Sanketh's grandfather said the family found out about the incident on Tuesday evening and alleged that that illegal activities such as drug use are taking place in the area. —*Salar News*

Political wrestling will start after bypolls: Bommai

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

BJP MP Basavaraj Bommai on Wednesday claimed the ongoing power tussle within the Congress is on a "short break" due to bypolls, but the State is headed towards a "political wrestling" for the Chief Minister's chair in May.

The former chief minister was campaigning for BJP candidate Srinivas T Dasakariyappa from Davangere South bypolls.

"Siddaramaiah says his government is politically stable. If you open the newspapers, every day there are reports about the CM and Deputy CM. One says that he won't quit the chair, while the other says he will certainly take the chair," Bommai said.

"Write it down: in May, as is said in North Karnataka, there will be a 'Jangi Nikali Kusti' for the chair. 'Jangi Nikali Kusti' means wrestling where one person remains standing and the other does not," he quipped.

Refuting Siddaramaiah's claims that his government is stable economically and politically, the former CM asked, "If you are economically stable, why was about Rs 15,000 crore from the budget not spent? You don't have money, so you have not spent." He said the people of Davangere South have the lucky opportunity to remove "evil Congress government". —*PTI*

Murmu lauds Tumakuru's Shivakumara Swami

TUMAKURU, 1 APRIL

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday said seers like Shivakumara Swami give shape to the soul of society and the nation, and their spiritual legacy continues to nourish the country even after their physical departure.

Known as 'Trivida dasohi' for his triple sacraments -- food, shelter and education -- among his followers, Shivakumara Swami was the pontiff of the renowned Siddaganga Mutt. He passed away at the age of 111 on 21 January, 2019.

Addressing the 119th birth anniversary and Guruvandana of the seer at Sree Siddaganga Mutt in Tumakuru, the President said, "I believe that seers like Shri Shivakumara Swamiji give shape to the soul of our society and our nation. His physical body merged into the supreme element in the year 2019, but his legacy continues to nourish society and the country."

Murmu said that the seer's life dedicated to the service of the poor and the deprived remained a unique example of expressing spirituality through welfare activities.

She lauded the temple for following the ideals of Basavanna and said that it brought her joy that the Matt was providing facilities for education. —*PTI*

President Droupadi Murmu during the 119th birth anniversary of late Shivakumara Swami, pontiff of the Siddaganga Math —*X @RASHTRAPATIBHVN*

SHEPHERD & 45 SHEEP DIE IN BLAZE AT BIDAR SHED

BIDAR, 1 APRIL

Authorities reported that an electrical short circuit on Tuesday sparked a fire that rapidly engulfed a shed in Boral village in the Chitaguppa taluk of Bidar district. A 65-year-old shepherd identified as Shankar Eerappa Metre was killed along with 30 sheep and 15 lambs.

Metre sustained burns to over 90 per cent of his body during the incident. Witnesses stated that he had been sleeping outdoors and rushed into the hut upon noticing the blaze.

The fatal fire that claimed Metre's life resulted in extensive property damage estimated at over Rs 26 lakh. The sudden fire decimated not only the shed but also the surrounding structure and its vital contents, including a flock of sheep and lambs, and significant reserves of maize, wheat, and cotton.

Tahsildar Mahesh Patil, Additional Superintendent of Police Chandrakant Pujari, CPI Raghuveer Singh Thakur, JESCOM Executive Engineer Ramesh Patil, AEE Ravi Karbari, and PSI Wasim Patil visited the spot and gathered information. —*Salar News*

Diageo India, traffic cops, IRTE try to fix congestion

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Diageo India has partnered with the Institute of Road Traffic Education and the Bengaluru Traffic Police to undertake a road safety and traffic engineering study aimed at improving safety and efficiency at key city intersections.

The initiative, part of Diageo India's Corporate Social Responsibility efforts, focuses on enhancing urban mobility through research, on-ground assessment, and capacity building.

The study covered three major junctions—Chalukya Circle, Cantonment Railway Station Junction, and H Siddaiah Circle—representing administrative, transport, and recreational zones.

Using a data-driven methodology, the analysis examined traffic volume, pedestrian movement, behavioural patterns, and infrastructure design.

It identified measures to improve traffic flow and reduce risks.

Recommendations include low-cost engineering solutions such as better lane channelisation, pedestrian refuge islands, optimised signal placement, and improved signage.

Officials said better coordination between planning, engineering, and enforcement agencies will be key to improving road safety. —*PTI*

MAHARASHTRA DISPUTE

MES urges SC to hear Belagavi border row

BELAGAVI, 1 APRIL

The Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES), a pro-Marathi organisation in Karnataka, has launched a signature campaign in disputed border areas, urging the Supreme Court to begin early proceedings in the long-pending Maharashtra–Karnataka border dispute case.

The campaign, which began on Tuesday, aims to collect at least one lakh signatures seeking resolution of the long pending dispute.

MES stated that even after 22 years since the petition was filed, the court is yet to decide whether the case falls under its jurisdiction. Maharashtra had filed a suit in the Supreme Court in 2004 against the Union Government and the State of Karnataka, claiming that 854 places in Karnataka, including Belagavi, rightfully belong to it.

The Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES) demands that parts of Belagavi be declared as Maharashtra's territory —*ANI*

Addressing a gathering, MES Khanapur taluk president Gopal Desai said the campaign is being organised to secure what he termed the "legitimate demands" of Marathi-speaking people in the border areas.

He added that the campaign would be conducted through democratic means and appealed to Marathi-speaking residents across Belagavi, Nippani, Karwar, Bhalki and Bidar to participate actively in the campaign. He urged residents to voluntarily sign in to support of the demand that Marathi-speaking regions be merged with Maharashtra.

Former MLA Digambar Patil, besides other MES leaders and activists, was present at the meeting. —*Salar News*

Assam Cong planning law to protect infiltrators: PM

Modi accuses Congress of trying to divide the country

GOGAMUKH/BEHALI, 1 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday launched the BJP's poll campaign in Assam by wooing tea garden workers and accused the Congress of planning to bring a law to protect infiltrators if it comes to power, which the BJP and its allies will not allow.

Addressing a rally at Gogamukh in Dhemaji district, Modi alleged that the Congress "if it comes to power in Assam, will bring in a law to protect infiltrators, which the BJP and its allies will not allow."

He claimed that before 2014, the Congress "tried to introduce a law at the Centre" but was opposed by the NDA.

He also accused the grand old party of "trying to divide the country as the Muslim League did during Partition".

"For the Congress, there are two families -one in Delhi and another in Assam, and their priority is the interest of their families and not that of the people," the PM said.

Earlier, Modi began his campaign with a visit to the Manohari Tea Estate in Dibrugarh district, where he plucked tea leaves alongside 19 women workers.

Tea workers traditionally exercised their franchise in favour of the Congress for decades, but there has been a significant swing towards the BJP since the 2014 Parliamentary polls.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi plucks tea leaves with women workers at a tea garden, in Dibrugarh, Assam, on Wednesday —PTI

Speaking at another rally at Behali in Biswanath district, Modi alleged that the Congress did "not deliver justice to Assam's resources", while the "BJP is utilising the state's diverse assets for its development".

He accused the Congress of being "opposed to development and 'bhrastachar ki janani' (mother of corruption)".

He also charged the Congress with encouraging infiltrators to ''settle on satras, namghars and temple land parcels in various districts of the state to create a vote bank".

Elections to Assam's 126 assembly constituencies will be held on 9 April, with counting of votes on 4 May. —PTI

'Orunodoi to cover 2 women per family'

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said two women from the same family will be brought under the 'Orunodoi' scheme in households with a larger number of members, relaxing the existing one-family-one-beneficiary norm. Under the scheme, eligible women receive financial assistance of Rs 1,250 per month directly in their bank accounts. The scheme currently covers nearly 40 lakh women. Sarma said that when a son in such families gets married, the newlywed bride will also be eligible for coverage under the scheme. —PTI

1 family looting Assam: Priyanka slams Himanta

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra slammed Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and alleged that "only one family is looting" everything in the resource-rich state, while the people "don't have anything". Vadra alleged that NDA government is functioning by threatening the people, and attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and CM as "cowards". She launched a scathing attack on PM & charged him with being a "slave" of US. "PM Modi and CM Himanta are ruling the country and state with fear and threats. Our fight is against that fear, and for protecting Assam's culture and civilisation," she said. —PTI

WB police seized narcotics, liquor, cash worth ₹274 cr

KOLKATA, 1 APRIL

Police have seized cash, liquor, narcotics and other items worth over Rs 274 crore in West Bengal, as part of intensified enforcement measures ahead of the assembly elections, officials said on Wednesday. The cumulative value of seizures since 26 February stands at Rs 274.12 crore, reflecting heightened vigilance across the state, a statement issued by the office of the West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said. The seizures include cash worth Rs 6.56 crore, liquor valued at Rs 43.37 crore, and drugs and narcotics amounting to Rs 58.13 crore.

In addition, precious metals worth Rs 25.46 crore and freebies valued at Rs 140.58 crore have also been confiscated, it said. —PTI

—PTI

Suresh Gopi to face trial in plea against his election

KOCHI, 1 APRIL

In a setback for Union Minister of State Suresh Gopi, the Kerala High Court on Wednesday dismissed his plea challenging an election petition against him and said that he will have to face trial in the matter. Justice Kauser Edappagath rejected Gopi's application, questioning the maintainability of the election petition. The detailed order is awaited. The election petition was moved against the Union Minister of State for Petroleum, Natural Gas and Tourism by Thrissur native Binoy AS, a leader of the All India Youth Federation.

In his plea, Binoy has alleged that Gopi, who won from Thrissur Lok Sabha constituency in 2024, engaged in "corrupt practices", including misuse of religious symbols, during his poll campaign. —PTI

Dubey tenders apology for Biju, CIA link remarks

BHUBANESWAR, 1 APRIL

BJP MP Nishikant Dubey on Wednesday tendered an unconditional apology for his claim that former Odisha chief minister Biju Patnaik was the link between Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the CIA during the war against China in the 1960s. He was criticised within and outside the BJP for the comment. Taking to X, the BJP Parliamentarian, said, "Last week, while speaking to the media, an incorrect interpretation was drawn from my remarks regarding the Nehru-Gandhi family's exploits, specifically in reference to the honourable Shri Biju Patnaik ji, a former Chief Minister and one of India's leading leaders". He stressed that it was his personal view. —PTI

Former AAP leader HS Phoolka joins BJP

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Senior Supreme Court advocate and former Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader H S Phoolka, best known for representing 1984 anti-Sikh riots victims in their quest for justice, joined the BJP on Wednesday. The move is being seen as a shot in the BJP's arm as it gears up to oust the AAP government from Punjab in the Assembly polls due next year.Phoolka joined the party in the presence of Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, Delhi minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa, BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh, Punjab unit chief Sunil Jakhar and party chief spokesperson Anil Baluni. Welcoming Phoolka into the BJP fold, Puri said his induction would add strength to the party. Chugh also expressed confidence that his entry would bolster the BJP's organisation in the state. —PTI

BATTLEGROUND TN

BJP plotting to create Manipur-like riots in TN: Stalin

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI/ CHENNAI/TIRUPATTUR, 1 APRIL

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK head MK Stalin on Wednesday charged the BJP with trying to plot violence in the state, "like what happened in Uttar Pradesh and Manipur" ahead of the coming assembly elections.

Addressing a party rally, Stalin, said, "We have thwarted the BJP conspiracies to create unrest. It is because of the peaceful environment and skilled human resources under our governance that investments are coming to Tamil Nadu today. This growth must be taken to the next level."

DMK HAS ANTI-HINDU BIAS: BJP

In Chennai, BJP's Tamil Nadu election in-charge Piyush Goyal released a "chargesheet" that accused the DMK government of systemic corruption, financial mismanagement, and harbouring an explicit anti-Hindu bias. BJP also alleged deep-rooted graft across state departments.

SECURITY FOR VIJAY

Meanwhile, the TVK has in a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah alleged inadequate security for party Chief Vijay during his campaign in Perambur on 30 March. TVK has sought effective protection and traffic management during Vijay's poll campaigns.

'BJP CAN'T WIN'

At a rally for party candidates in Natrampalli and Vaniyambadi in Tirupattur district, Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin said the BJP's "conspiracies" will be defeated and TN team will ensure victory in the polls. —PTI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK President MK Stalin interacts with supporters at a local tea shop in Palakkarai, on Wednesday —PTI

Tejashwi joins LDF campaign in Kerala

T'PURAM 1 APRIL

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday welcomed the arrival of RJD leader **Tejashwi Yadav** to campaign for the ruling LDF in the upcoming Assembly polls, saying his presence would bolster efforts to protect the country's secular fabric.

In a post on X, Vijayan thanked Yadav for extending solidarity and joining the Left Democratic Front's campaign in the state for the April 9 elections.

"Thank you, @yadavtejashwi, for your solidarity and for joining the LDF's campaign in Keralam. Your presence and support strengthen our collective fight to protect our secular fabric and advance a pro-people alternative. Together, we will ensure a resounding victory for the people of Keralam," he said.

Yadav, who reached Malappuram to campaign for CPI(M) candidate MK Sakeer in the Ponnani constituency on Tuesday, also expressed gratitude for the people's support. "Grateful to the people of Malappuram for their love, support, warmth and affection," he said an X post. —PTI

Kerala BJP Chief's banner sparks buzz

Days after his controversial 'Hindu MLA' remark, a flex board featuring the names of former legislators from the Guruvayur constituency has appeared as part of BJP candidate B Gopalakrishnan's campaign, drawing widespread attention. Installed at a busy junction in the constituency, the flex board lists the names of MLAs elected from Guruvayur between 1977 and 2021, along with the years they were elected. The development comes days after police registered a case against the BJP leader over his alleged communal remarks in a poll campaign video. —PTI

'File nominations carefully or EC will reject'

KOLKATA, 1 APRIL

Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday alleged that officials recently appointed by the Election Commission were entrusted to reject nominations of her party's poll candidates and urged them to be cautious while filing their nominations.

Addressing three election rallies in the state, Banerjee charged the BJP with misusing central agencies and bringing in people from outside for its political benefit.

"Everything has been changed; it's a new setup here. The newly appointed officers by the EC are entrusted to reject your nomination; so be cautious while filing your nominations. Take lawyers with you while filing nomination," she said at the rally in Nanoor in Birbhum district.

The Chief Minister also urged people, especially women, not to vote for the BJP. "They (BJP) are anti-women, that's why their names are being deleted in SIR citing logical discrepancy," she said.

At a rally in Burwan, she the CM alleged large-scale deletion of voters' names in several constituencies. "But these will not help the BJP win the election," Banerjee said and asked people to consider her as the candidate in all 294 assembly constituencies.

Meanwhile, violence broke out at the West Bengal Pradesh Congress headquarters here on Wednesday during protests over candidate selection for the Assembly elections, leaving at least one party worker injured, police said.

It all started after agitated party workers staged a demonstration demanding the cancellation of "outsider" candidates, which soon escalated into clashes between rival factions.

Their main grievance centred around the nomination of Rohan Mitra, son of former party president Somen Mitra, from Ballygunge Assembly constituency. —PTI

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with tribal artists during a public rally, in Birbhum, on Wednesday —PTI

47L objections in WB SIR resolved: SC

The Supreme Court on Wednesday expressed optimism over the progress of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal, noting that approximately 47.4 lakh objections out of a total of 60 lakh have been disposed of as on 31 March. It noted the information recorded by the chief justice of the high court that all pending objections will most probably be adjudicated by 7 April and keeping this in mind the CJI posted the pleas, for further hearing on 6 April. —PTI

WB Left Front to contest 252 seats, ISF 30, CPI(ML) 8

KOLKATA, 1 APRIL

The Left Front on Wednesday announced its seat-sharing arrangement with the ISF and CPI(ML) Liberation to contest the West Bengal assembly elections.

The ISF will contest 30 seats and CPI(ML) Liberation will field candidates in eight Assembly constituencies, Left Front chairman Biman Bose said.

The Left Front will field candidates in 252 of the 294 seats in the state, with the CPI(M) contesting 195 seats, All India Forward Bloc 23, CPI and RSP 16 each, and RCPI and Marxist Forward Bloc one each.

The Left Front will support as associates one candidate of West Bengal Socialist Party and the three contestants from other "democratic and social" organisations.

The state will go to polls held on 23 and 29 April. —PTI

YSRCP STAGES WALKOUT

LS passes bill to recognise Amaravati as Andhra's capital

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

A bill seeking to recognise Amaravati as the sole and permanent capital of Andhra Pradesh was passed by the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, with the opposition Congress also supporting it along with the NDA.

The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) opposed the bill during the debate and walked out of the House in protest when it was being passed.

The bill, which would prevent any future bid to alter the decision to make Amaravati the sole and permanent capital, was passed in the Lok Sabha by a voice vote, fulfilling an aspiration of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, whose party TDP is a key constituent of the ruling NDA.

Responding to a nearly two-hour-long debate on the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai thanked the members for supporting an Andhra Pradesh legislative assembly resolution that urged the Centre to provide legal backing to Amaravati as the Andhra Pradesh capital.

Once the bill becomes a law, Amaravati will be the sole and permanent capital of Andhra Pradesh with effect from 2 June, 2024.During his tenure as chief minister, YSRCP leader Jagan Mohan Reddy had announced that Andhra Pradesh would have three capitals — administrative capital at Visakhapatnam, legislative capital at Amaravati and judicial capital at Kurnool -- instead of a single capital city at Amaravati. After Naidu returned to power in 2024, he announced that Amaravati would be the sole capital of the state. —PTI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu during a meeting on the Amaravati Quantum Valley, in Amaravati, on Wednesday —PTI

Passing of Jan Vishwas Bill 2.0 triggers face-off in LS

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

The members of the ruling party and opposition traded barbs in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday over the second edition of the Jan Vishwas bill, which was passed.

Moving the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026, for consideration and passage in the Lok Sabha, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said the bill seeks to enhance the ease of doing business and ease of living by decriminalising minor offences.

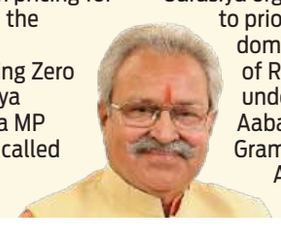
Congress party's Chamala Kiran Kumar Reddy said that he is speaking on the "hypocrisy" of the proposed legislation, which in reality, is "normalising corruption, fraud and corporate non-compliance". —PTI

'SC/ST enrolment down 25% in JNU'

Congress leader and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijaya Singh alleged in Rajya Sabha that the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) was undermining its social justice mandate, citing a 25 per cent decline in SC/ST enrolment, irregularities in reserved faculty appointments and the Vice-Chancellor's remarks that opposed the university's founding principles. Singh noted JNU was drifting from national integration and democratic values. —PTI

MPs raise drug cost, women's care issues

Uttar Pradesh MP **Laxmikant Bajpayee** urged the government to enforce uniform pricing for medicines with the same active ingredient, during Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha, Haryana MP Rekha Sharma called for greater recognition of the care economy involving women. Rajasthan MP Chunnilal Garasiya urged government to prioritise tribal-dominated districts of Rajasthan under the Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan. —PTI



—ANI

Delhi Mayor's office receives bomb threat

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Delhi Mayor Raja Iqbal Singh's office received a bomb threat via e-mail on Wednesday, an official stated. According to preliminary information, the threat was sent to the mayor's official e-mail ID, claiming that his office would be blown up around 2.11pm. "The e-mail was purportedly sent in the name of a group identifying itself as "Khalistan National Army". After which, security agencies were immediately alerted, while security around the Mayor's office was tightened and thorough checks are in process," a senior police officer said. Police confirmed that cyber teams are analysing the origin of the e-mail, and efforts are underway to trace the sender. Further investigation is in progress, police added. —*PTI*

Rape-accused 'godman' Kharat sent to custody

NASHIK, 1 APRIL

A Maharashtra court remanded "godman" Ashok Kharat, who is accused of rape, to 14-day judicial custody on Wednesday. Session Judge BN Ichpurani remanded Kharat in custody till 14 April at Nashik Road Central Jail. Kharat was arrested on 18 March after a 35-year-old woman accused him of repeated rape over three years. Multiple complaints followed his arrest — at least 10 FIRs have been registered against him at Sarkarwada police station in Nashik, eight for alleged sexual assault or exploitation and two for cheating, while the SIT has received over 100 phone complaints against him. The SIT sought judicial custody before the court following the completion of Kharat's police custody on Wednesday. —*PTI*

UP women block road protesting against liquor shop

ETAH, 1 APRIL

Women in Uttar Pradesh's Kasaiganj district on Wednesday took to the streets against the proposed opening of a country liquor shop in their locality, alleging that "it could lead to antisocial activities in the area", police said. The protest took place in the Gangeshwar Colony area along the Sarawati Shishu Mandir Road, where residents, particularly women, gathered in large numbers and raised slogans against the administration. According to officials, the road blockade disrupted traffic for several hours. Locals said they had been opposing the proposed liquor outlet as it is located between a residential neighbourhood and a route frequently used by children. The women alleged that opening a liquor shop at the site would lead to an increase in anti-social activities and create an atmosphere of insecurity. —*PTI*

What is your agenda: SC bins AI crash plea

It sought info of crash that killed over 241, including engine's time-chart & fuel switch transition

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

An irate Supreme Court on Wednesday dismissed a plea related to the preliminary investigation report on last June's Air India crash in Ahmedabad, questioning the petitioner's "deep-rooted agenda".

A bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, with Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, also refused to treat the plea as a representation. "As if we don't understand the motive. The people who lost their lives... are not filing (petitions) but you are," the CJI remarked.

The petitioner had challenged a 25 February Delhi High Court order rejecting a PIL seeking inclusion of the "complete sequence of events" in the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau's preliminary report. The plea sought details such as the time-chart of engine "flame out" and fuel switch transitions, whether mechanical or manual, and their publication in the public domain.

The high court had termed the PIL "highly misconceived", holding such relief could not be granted. It observed the petitioner should instead seek information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act, adding that relevant details would be provided if permissible under law.

The crash occurred on 12 June last year when Air India flight AI 171, a Boeing 787-8 bound for London Gatwick, went down shortly after take-off from Ahmedabad's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport. The aircraft crashed into a medical college hostel complex and burst into flames, killing 241 of the 242 people onboard and 19 on the ground. —*PTI*

The crash occurred on 12 June last year when Air India flight AI 171 went down shortly after take-off —*PTI*

Bhojshala case: SC asks MP HC to hear Muslims' plea

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Supreme Court said the Madhya Pradesh High Court will consider objections raised by the Muslim side to the ongoing Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) survey of the disputed Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex in Dhar.

While declining to interfere with the High Court proceedings, the apex court stressed that all objections, including those relating to videography and colour photographs, must be heard in line with principles of natural justice. A bench led by Chief Justice Surya Kant, with Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi, heard senior advocate Salman Khurshid for the Muslim side and counsel for Hindu parties.

Khurshid flagged concerns over access to evidence, seeking copies of survey videography and photographs.

The bench clarified it had expressed no opinion on merits and parties may approach the High Court for grievances. The high court had earlier said it would inspect the site before 2 April and subsequently visited it on 28 March. The ASI's report suggests a pre-existing structure from the Paramara period, with temple remains reused in the mosque. Hindus claim findings support a temple origin, while the Muslim side disputes the survey, alleging ignored objections and inclusion of planted objects. —*PTI*

SC raps Centre for appeal against CISF official

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Rapping the Centre for "unnecessary litigation", Supreme Court imposed Rs 25,000 fine for challenging a Punjab and Haryana High Court order that set aside a CISF official's dismissal.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan upheld the ruling and granted back wages, terming the punishment disproportionate. Questioning the appeal, Justice Nagarathna said, "We hear pendency, pendency. Who is the biggest litigant?".

The official faced charges of 11 days' absence and alleged misconduct linked to a woman eloping to marry his brother.

The High Court found the absence was on sanctioned medical leave and noted the woman had no grievance, concluding there was no misconduct warranting dismissal. —*PTI*

SC STAYS TRIAL AGAINST TN MINISTER DURAI IN DA CASE

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Supreme Court stayed trial court proceedings against Tamil Nadu Minister and DMK General Secretary Durai Murugan in a disproportionate-assets case, and issued notice to the state government.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan granted relief on Murugan's appeal against a Madras High Court order directing a Vellore court to frame charges. The case alleges Murugan amassed Rs 3.92 crore between 1996 and 2001 as PWD minister. A special court had discharged him and family members in 2007, but the high court revived proceedings in 2023 on a DVAC plea. —*PTI*

Israeli firm supplies 1st batch of light machine guns to India

JERUSALEM, 1 APRIL

A leading Israeli small arms manufacturer has delivered the first batch of light machine guns (LMGs) to India under the 'Make in India' initiative, following technology transfer.

Israel Weapons Industries (IWI) said 2,000 NEGEV 7.62x51 LMGs, part of a larger order of 41,000, were delivered over the weekend, with another 4,000 units due later this year. The delivery was executed by PLR Systems, a joint venture between IWI and the Adani Group, and the first private firm in India to manufacture small arms and ammunition.

The company said the milestone reflects successful technology transfer and its commitment to supporting India's defence manufacturing ecosystem.

The NEGEV 7.62x51, used by the Israel Defence Forces, is among the lightest in its class and is designed for reliability in harsh conditions. It offers both semi-automatic and fully automatic modes, high precision, and effective target acquisition. Its use of 7.62 mm ammunition enables penetration of fortified cover, making it suitable for urban combat and critical missions.

The weapon can be mounted on helicopters, vehicles and naval platforms, and features Picatinny rails, tritium night sights, and NATO-standard durability. It is also compatible with computerised weapon systems for enhanced operational effectiveness.

PLR Systems has also secured a contract to supply 170,000 close-quarter battle carbines, with 18,000 units expected this year, amid expanding India-Israel defence cooperation. —*PTI*

The NEGEV 7.62x51, used by the Israel Defence Forces, is among the lightest in its class —*ANI*

Terrorist killed during night-long encounter in J&K

SRINAGAR, 1 APRIL

An terrorist was killed in an overnight encounter in Jammu and Kashmir's Ganderbal district, the Army said on Wednesday.

A cordon and search operation was launched by security forces on Tuesday night, in Arahama area of Gandebal district based on inputs of suspicious movement in the region.

Based on specific intelligence input, joint search operation was launched by the Army and Jammu and Kashmir Police in general area Arahama of Ganderbal, Srinagar-based Chinar Corps said in a post on X.

The cordon was tactically reorganised amidst intermittent firing, the Army wrote, saying the troops effectively retaliated with calibrated response, resulting in elimination of one terrorist. Officials said the anti-terror operation is in progress. —*PTI*

Malayalam director Ranjith arrested for sexual assault

KOCHI, 1 APRIL

Noted Malayalam filmmaker Ranjith Balakrishnan was remanded to 14 days' judicial custody by a Kochi court on Wednesday following his arrest in an attempted sexual assault case. The director, detained from Idukki on Tuesday evening, maintained that the allegations were "false" and said he would prove his innocence.

Police stated that the woman actor was "traumatised" and required counselling before filing her complaint. Kochi City Police Commissioner S Kaliraj Mahesh Kumar said a Special Investigation Team verified the allegations before proceeding with the arrest. He added that the incident allegedly occurred on a film set, with multiple witnesses, and stressed the need to protect the victim's identity.

The accused allegedly invited the actor to a caravan during a shoot and attempted to assault her. Evidence collection is ongoing, and police may seek custody for further questioning.

Kerala Culture Minister Saji Cherian affirmed government support for the victim, stating such acts would not be tolerated. Meanwhile, the Film Employees Federation of Kerala recommended suspending Ranjith from its directors' and writers' unions.

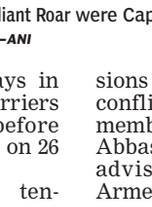
Ranjith, a three-time National Award winner, is known for films such as 'Thirakkatha', 'Indian Rupee', and 'Spirit'. He previously resigned as chairman of the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy in 2024 amid similar allegations.

Earlier complaints, including one by a Bengali actress relating to 'Paleri Manikyam' (2009), had also accused him of inappropriate conduct. Authorities have urged others in the industry to come forward. —*PTI*

HC NOTICE ISSUED TO KEJRI ON ED PLEA

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's stand on a plea by the ED challenging his acquittal in two separate cases lodged against him for not appearing before the agency despite summonses issued in the excise policy case.



Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma issued notice to the AAP leader on two pleas by the ED against the trial court's 22 January orders, and listed the matter for hearing on 29 April.

The agency alleged in its complaint in the trial court that the then chief minister intentionally omitted to obey them by not responding to summonses and did not attend the probe.

It also alleged Kejriwal raised frivolous objections and deliberately created grounds for not attending the probe.

During the hearing, the counsel for the ED, submitted that the trial court "committed a grave error" as it acquitted Kejriwal despite there being no dispute that summons was duly issued and received but he did not appear before the agency. In its decision, the trial court said that ED failed to prove that Kejriwal intentionally disobeyed the summonses issued to him. On 27 February, the trial court discharged Kejriwal, Sisodia and 21 others in the liquor policy

T'gana seizes 14,685 kg of adulterated food including ginger-garlic paste, meat

HYDERABAD, 1 APRIL

The authorities in coordination with the newly formed 'H-FAST' (Hyderabad - Food Adulteration Surveillance Team) team have arrested over 60 people here involved in manufacturing and selling adulterated food products.

The arrests were made during March. The adulterated food products being manufactured illegally included ginger-garlic pastes, bakery items, including Hyderabad's iconic Osmania biscuits.

A total of 61 cases were registered and 64 people were arrested with 14,685 Kgs and 400 liters

of adulterated food products seized in the crackdown on food adulteration in the city as on 30 March, officials said.

Several food items, including ginger garlic paste, ice cream, paneer and other dairy products, tea powder, chicken/meat, curd, chips/candy, samosas, ghee, oil, were found contaminated, besides low quality raw materials being used in their manufacturing.

The Hyderabad Food Adulteration Surveillance Team (H-FAST) was established under the leadership of Hyderabad Police Commissioner V C Sajjanar, in close coordination with Food Safety Officers to strengthen food safety enforcement and regulatory action.

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on 30 March said his government would establish a dedicated mechanism to check food adulteration. —*PTI*

Luthras get bail in Goa club fire, to remain in jail

PANAJI, 1 APRIL

A sessions court at Mapusa in Goa on Wednesday granted bail to Saurabh Luthra and Gaurav Luthra, owners of the Birch by Romeo Lane nightclub, in a case related to the devastating fire of last December that killed 25 people.

The Luthras, however, would remain in jail as they were arrested in a case of forgery on Monday.

Hours after a fire broke out at the club situated in Arpora village on 6 December, 2025, the brothers fled to Thailand, from where they were deported to India on 17 December and arrested by Anjuna Police.

It was alleged that the nightclub lacked requisite permissions and violated several safety-related rules.

Advocate Parag Rao, their lawyer, said additional sessions judge Dvijple Patkar granted conditional bail to both the brothers in the fire case.

The brothers were taken into custody by Mapusa Police on Monday in an alleged forgery case. Despite getting bail in the fire case, they would continue to remain in prison in the second case.

The duo are accused of forging documents to obtain an NOC from the Health Department which was used to get an Excise License for the club. —*PTI*

'HAD TO TAKE THE RISK'

Indian sailors recount escape from Iran war

GHAZIABAD/MEERUT, 1 APRIL

Indian sailors stranded in conflict-hit Iran have recounted a perilous escape after weeks of detention and uncertainty, saying they "had to take the risk" to return home safely.

What began as a routine voyage turned into a months-long ordeal for the 18-member crew of oil tanker MT Valiant Roar, including 16 Indians. The vessel was intercepted on 8 December in international waters while heading to Khor Fakkan. Among those onboard were Captain Vijay Kumar, 45, and third engineer Ketan Mehta, 27.

Iranian authorities initially accused the crew of diesel smuggling and later of transporting black oil, but neither charge held in court. The sailors spent around 50 days in jail, facing language barriers and uncertainty, before receiving release papers on 26 February.

Among those onboard MT Valiant Roar were Captain Vijay Kumar 45 and third engineer Ketan Mehta —*ANI*

However, escalating tensions soon turned into open conflict, leaving some crew members stranded at Bandar Abbas. The Indian embassy advised evacuation via Armenia or Azerbaijan.

With no immediate evacuation, the sailors undertook a nearly 2,000-km road journey. Assisted by Indian officials with visas, they travelled towards the Armenian border near Julfa amid missile strikes in nearby areas. "We knew there was risk, but staying back was worse," Mehta said.

After waiting two to three days for clearance, the group crossed into Armenia on 27 March, reached Yerevan, and flew via Dubai to Mumbai, landing on 29 March.

Kumar had left earlier on 22 March and reached home on 31 March. Families financed the journey as wages had stopped, while authorities have asked the crew to brief officials on their return. —*PTI*

Assam man beaten to death by 6 in Kerala over theft

KOCHI, 1 APRIL

An Assam native was beaten to death near Perumbavoor here on Wednesday morning by six of his work colleagues, also hailing from the same state, suspecting him of trying to steal one of their phones, police said.

An officer of Perumbavoor police station said that all six accused have been taken into custody and are being questioned.

Currently, they have not been formally arrested and a case is yet to be registered, the officer said.

"We are collecting all details," he said.

The victim was 25-years-old and he and the other six accused worked at a plywood company at Perumbavoor, police said.

"After beating up the victim, the accused took him to the hospital where he succumbed to his injuries. The hospital informed us," the officer said. —*PTI*

An officer of Perumbavoor police station said that all the accused have been taken into custody and are being questioned —*ANI*

PANGUNI UTHIRAM

Devotees with pierced cheeks take part in Panguni Uthiram procession, honouring the God Murugan during the Tamil month of Panguni, in New Delhi —*PTI*

FCRA Bill sparks row over minority rights, nat'l safety

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, saw a sharp political divide on Wednesday, with the BJP defending the move as necessary for national security and transparency, while the Opposition alleged it will curb minority rights and tighten government control over NGOs.

Defending the amendments, BJP MP Dinesh Sharma rejected the Opposition's charge that the bill targets minorities. "The government does not differentiate between minorities and majorities as the opposition does. National security is the government's foremost priority," he said.

"If foreign funds received by NGOs are used for protests against the government, or for media and social media misinformation, or to promote Naxalism, then it is certainly necessary for the government to impose restrictions in the interest of national security," Sharma told media persons inside the Parliament House complex.

BJP MP Ghulam Ali Khatana accused the Congress of marginalising minorities. "They have pushed minorities to the margins, and now they try to frighten and intimidate them. They want to turn them into a vote bank," he alleged.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi does not believe in appeasement. Everyone is a respected citizen. Any community, any NGO, as long as they work within the framework of the law, will get an opportunity to grow in the country," he said.

Opposition parties, however, mounted a strong attack on the bill.

Several Opposition MPs led by the Congress staged a protest in the Parliament House complex on Wednesday against the Bill and demanded that the proposed legislation be withdrawn.

Displaying a huge banner with 'Stop Targeting NGOs and Institutions' written on it, the MPs raised slogans against the government and demanded the withdrawal of the Bill.

Several Congress MPs, SP's Dimple Yadav and Ram Gopal Yadav, IUML's ET Mohammad Basheer, NCP(SP)'s Supriya Sule and RSP's NK Premchandran, among others, participated in the protest.

Opposition MPs stage a protest during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Wednesday —*PTI*

Congress MP Manish Tewari termed the amendments "unconstitutional".

"When the FCRA Amendment Bill was introduced, I had opposed it on the first principle of constitutionalism. It is arbitrary, malafide, and capricious. It does not measure on the touchstone of constitutionality," he said.

He added that it offends Articles 14 (equality before the law), 19 (guarantees six fundamental freedoms), and 300A (No person shall be deprived of his property save by authority of law) of the Constitution, and therefore it needs to be strongly opposed.

Congress MP Hibi Eden said his party will oppose the bill, arguing that existing provisions are already stringent.

"Congress will strongly oppose the Bill. The 2014 amendment itself imposed a lot of restrictions. If somebody is getting benefit in education and orphanages, should the government target such charities?" he said.

"It is unfortunate that an organisation founded by the late Mother Teresa had its FCRA registration cancelled in 2021," Eden added.

Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Ram Gopal Yadav said the government's legislative approach has not benefited common people.

"Whatever bills this government brings will be against the people of the country. All the bills introduced so far have either favoured some capitalists or served the interests of certain groups, but not a single bill has benefited the common people to date. Not even one," he said.

"In the name of regulating them, they will collect funds from them and then show selectively where work has been done and what has been achieved through them," he added.

SP MP Dimple Yadav alleged that the bill is aimed at tightening control over institutions.

"This FCRA bill amendment is being brought so that government institutions and non-government institutions function according to the government's will. I believe that through this, the government is trying to tighten its grip on institutions that are doing good work. What is being done is not democratic," she said.

The bill to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) was introduced in the Lok Sabha on 25 March, with the government making it clear that individuals engaging in forced religious conversion through foreign funding will not be spared.

Introducing the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai had said that the legislation aims to enhance transparency and ensure proper utilisation of funds received from abroad.

On Tuesday, Union Minister Kiren Rijiju asserted that the FCRA Amendment Bill only seeks to stop the use of foreign funding against national security and interests and not to target any religious organisation. —*PTI*

SALAR ساہر

Fuel prices won't return to normal any time soon: EU

Skyrocketing oil and gas prices in Europe as a result of the ongoing Iran war won't return to normal levels any time soon, even if peace is declared tomorrow, the European Union's energy commissioner warned Tuesday.

Commissioner Dan Jorgensen said that although there are no immediate oil and gas supply shortages in the 27-member bloc, there's pressure on diesel and jet fuel supply as well as "increasing constraints" in global gas markets that are resulting in higher electricity prices.

"What I find extremely important is to state as clearly as I can, that even if that peace is here tomorrow, still we will not go back to normal in a foreseeable future," Jorgensen told a news conference after a meeting of EU energy ministers.

He said the EU's executive arm is preparing a string of measures designed to help families and businesses weather the huge spike in oil prices that have resulted in about a 70 per cent price hike for gas and 60 per cent for oil in Europe.

Since the start of the war, the EU's bill for imported fossil fuels has jumped by 14 billion euros, according to Jorgensen.

Closely coordinated action between all EU members is necessary to "avoid fragmented national responses and disruptive signals to the markets," he said.

The "toolbox" of measures now in the works will be unveiled "quite soon" and will include ways to make it easier for states to decouple gas prices from electricity prices, the commissioner said. He added that a tax cut on electricity, as suggested by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, is also being weighed.

- Commissioner Dan Jorgensen EU's executive arm is preparing a string of measures designed to help families and businesses weather the huge spike in oil prices that have resulted in about a 70 per cent price hike for gas and 60 per cent for oil in Europe.

Jorgensen said, although he doesn't foresee a repeat of the 2022 natural gas crisis, where companies reaped huge profits from a massive gas price hike, a one-time "windfall tax" on such companies "is a possibility".

There are now "good opportunities" for member states to financially support vulnerable groups or industries now under "extraordinary stress," and the Commission would make "these possibilities even simpler and wider," said Jorgensen.

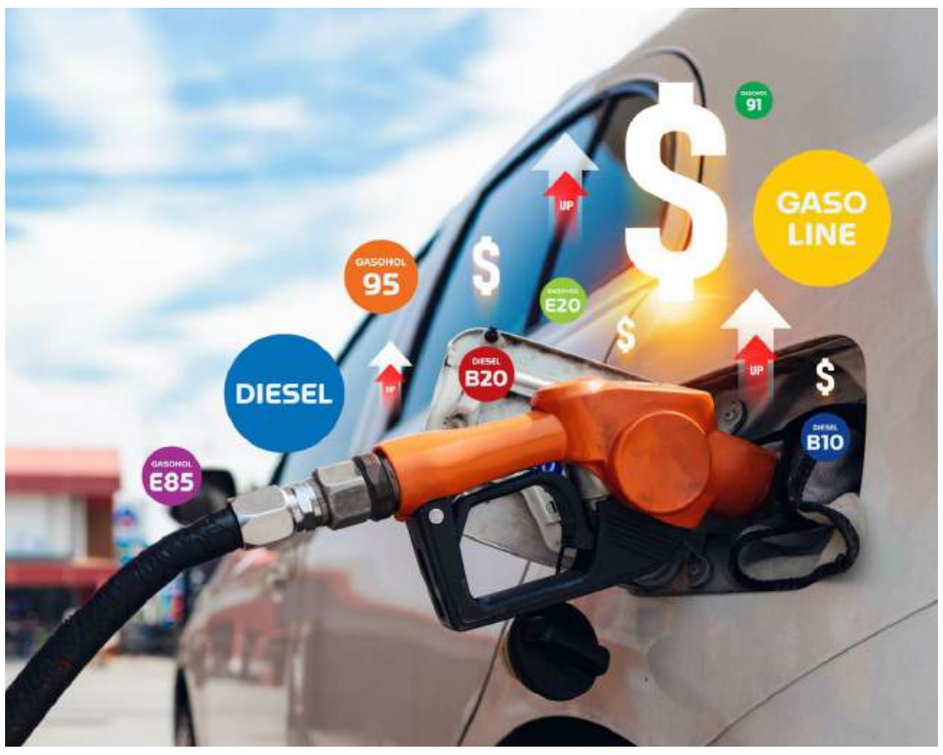
Jorgensen also encouraged EU members to consider the International Energy Agency's 10-point plan, which includes work from home, reduced highway speeds, encouraging public transport and increasing car sharing.

He said the EU stands by its ban on Russian gas purchases, which is meant to reduce dependence on Russian gas and choke off funding for Russia's war in Ukraine.

Reliance on Russian gas dropped from 45 per cent before the war to 10 per cent now and will be reduced to zero once imports from other suppliers ramp up, especially from the US.

The EU is looking at new energy sources from Azerbaijan, Algeria and Canada, as well as smaller producers around the world.

The commissioner warned the EU should never "repeat the mistakes of the past, allowing Putin to weaponise energy against us and blackmail member states". He added that "it would be totally unacceptable" for the EU to continue buying energy that would "indirectly help finance the terrible war that Putin is conducting in Ukraine". —*PTI*



LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

India maintains high import duties, non-tariff barriers: US report

The US has reiterated that India maintains "high" import duties on a range of goods, including agricultural products, pharmaceuticals and alcoholic beverages, along with various non-tariff barriers.

India has always maintained that its duties are in compliance with the rules of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

According to the US Trade Representative's 2026 National Trade Estimate (NTE) Report on foreign trade barriers, released on 31 March, given the large disparity between WTO-bound and applied rates, India has considerable flexibility to change tariff rates for both agricultural and non-agricultural products at any time, creating tremendous uncertainty for US workers, farmers, ranchers, and exporters.

It is an annual report that lists key policies and practices of countries that affect US exports, investments, and digital trade. In 2025, the report also alleged that import tariffs in India are high.

The report has highlighted several trade and regulatory challenges between the US and India, including issues related to tariffs, non-tariff barriers, intellectual property, services, digital trade, & transparency.

According to trade experts, most of the issues are repeats of earlier reports, and a few have been resolved already.

"India maintains high applied tariffs on a wide range of goods, including vegetable oils (as high as 45 per cent); apples, corn, and motorcycles (50 per cent); automobiles and flowers (60 per cent); natural rubber (70 per cent); coffee, raisins, and walnuts (100 per cent); and alcoholic beverages (150 per cent)," the report has said.

In addition, it said, India maintains "very high" basic customs duties on drug formulations, including life-saving drugs and finished medicines listed on the World Health Organisation's list of essential medicines.

"High tariff rates also present a significant barrier to trade in other agricultural goods and processed foods (example poultry, potatoes, citrus, almonds, pecans, apples, grapes, canned peaches, chocolate, cookies, frozen French fries, and other prepared foods used in fast-food restaurants)," it added.

India's World Trade Organisation (WTO) bound tariff rates on agricultural products are among the "highest" in the world, averaging 113.1 per cent and ranging as high as 300 per cent. India routinely changes the surcharge on a range of agricultural products, it said.

India's WTO bound tariff rates on agricultural products are among the 'highest' in the world, averaging 113.1 per cent and ranging as high as 300 per cent —*FREEPIK*

The report, however, stated that in its 2026 budget, India has reduced applied tariffs on a range of products across multiple sectors, including lifesaving medicines, raw materials and components for electric vehicle and mobile phone battery manufacturing, critical minerals such as lithium-ion battery scrap, cobalt powder, lead and zinc, certain electronic components, mobile phone parts and other industrial inputs.

On non-tariff barriers, it said India has imposed import bans, restrictions, licensing requirements on certain goods, mandatory Quality Control Orders (QCOs), customs barriers, price control on medical devices, and mandatory domestic testing and certification requirements for equipment.

"...the opaque and unpredictable nature of India's application of quantitative restrictions has affected the ability of US exporters to access the market. The United States, along with other trading partners, continues to raise India's application of quantitative restrictions at the WTO," it said.

It added that to impose import licenses, India distinguishes between new goods and those that are second-hand, remanufactured, refurbished, or reconditioned.

The report also alleged that India's tariff rates are announced with the annual budget and are modified on an ad hoc basis through notifications in the Gazette without the opportunity for public comment.

"The tariff rates are subject to numerous exemptions that vary according to the product, user, intended use, or specific export promotion program. This renders India's customs system both complex and open to administrative discretion," it said, adding that US companies have reported being subject to extensive inspections and seizures of imports that do not appear to be risk-based.

On QCOs, it said these orders target raw materials and intermediate goods in addition to finished products, which can disrupt supply chains.

Despite certain positive developments at the QCO front, burdensome and trade-restrictive QCOs still remain in effect for key US exports, including medical devices, chemicals, electronics, cosmetic ingredients, and agriculture.

It added that India lacks an overarching government procurement policy, and, as a result, its government procurement practices and procedures vary among different ministries within the central government.

Like last year, the report has flagged concerns on India's intellectual property policies and services sector.

"Foreign investment in businesses in certain major services sectors, including financial services and retail, is subject to limitations on foreign equity, and foreign participation in professional services is significantly restricted," it said. In addition, barriers to digital trade and electronic commerce, such as those imposed on electronic payment providers, have secondary effects on a wide variety of services, it added.

On the internet segment, it said India has conducted a number of localised shutdowns of the Internet in recent years, and these shutdowns restrict access to information and services, disrupting commercial operations, and thereby undermining a free and open Internet and impeding trade in the digital economy. —*PTI*

29 die as Russia's military plane crashes in Crimea

MOSCOW, 1 APRIL

A Russian military plane crashed in annexed Crimea, killing six crew and 23 passengers on board, Russian news agencies reported in the early hours of Wednesday, citing the country's Defence Ministry. The An-26 military transport plane was carrying out a scheduled flight over the Crimean peninsula, which Russia illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014. The military lost contact with the plane around 6 pm on Tuesday. Russia's top investigative agency, the Investigative Committee, said a total of seven crew members and 23 passengers were aboard the plane. It wasn't immediately clear from official statements if one crew member survived the crash. The plane crashed into a cliff, sources at the site of the crash told state news agencies. —*PTI*

Boat capsizes off Turkey coast killing 18 migrants

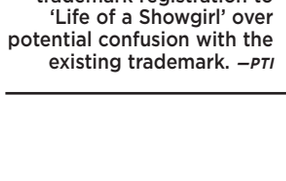
ANKARA, 1 APRIL

A rubber boat carrying migrants capsized in the Aegean Sea on Wednesday following a high-speed chase by the coast guard, killing 18 migrants. According to the Turkish Coast Guard, at least 21 migrants were rescued after their vessel ignored repeated warnings to stop and attempted to flee at high speed. The boat flooded off the coastal city of Bodrum and eventually capsized. Many migrants risk the short but dangerous boat journey from Turkey to nearby Greek islands, where fatal accidents are common. Greece is a key EU entry point for migrants. Rescue teams are continuing to look for any possible remaining victims. The nationalities of those on board the boat are not currently known. —*PTI*

Judge pauses Trump's ballroom renovation

WASHINGTON, 1 APRIL

A federal judge has ordered a halt to construction of the proposed USD 400 million ballroom at the White House, delivering a setback to President Donald Trump. US District Judge Richard Leon ruled that work cannot proceed without congressional approval, siding with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. He said there is no law that grants the President authority to initiate such sweeping changes. His administration has appealed, while Trump has defended the privately funded project. The order only allows for security-related construction to continue. The ballroom construction would mark the biggest White House change since Harry S Truman's era. Enforcement of the ruling is paused for 14 days pending appeal. The project remains uncertain amid the legal challenges. —*PTI*



—WIKI

Swift sued for album copyright infringement

LOS ANGELES, 1 APRIL

A lawsuit filed on Monday in California claims Taylor Swift's 2025 album, 'The Life of a Showgirl', infringes on the trademark of Maren Wade's 2014 'Confessions of a Showgirl', alleging that Swift's "glittery branding" stole the spotlight from a real showgirl's life. Swift's promotion allegedly caused "reverse confusion," where the newer, more prominent brand makes consumers think the original is the copy." Swift's trademark manager, her record label, and its merchandising arm are also named as defendants in the lawsuit. The lawsuit cites that the US Patent and Trademark Office declined to grant a trademark registration to 'Life of a Showgirl' over potential confusion with the existing trademark. —*PTI*

Trump threatens to pull US out of NATO with no ally backing

Trump says he'll air his 'disgust' tomorrow

WASHINGTON, 1 APRIL

US President Donald Trump has said he is strongly considering pulling the US out of NATO, as his allies have seemed unwilling to join the US-Israeli war on Iran.

During an interview with the Telegraph aired on Wednesday, Trump was asked whether he would reconsider US membership in the alliance after the war on Iran ends.

"Oh yes, I would say (it's) beyond reconsideration," Trump responded. "I was never swayed by NATO.

I always knew they were a paper tiger, and (Russian President) Vladimir Putin knows that too," he said. Referring to the UK, he said "You don't even have a navy. You're too old and had aircraft carriers that didn't work".

His comments sent shockwaves across Europe, whose leaders called for calm. Later on Wednesday, Trump told Reuters that he was "absolutely" considering pulling out of NATO. "Wouldn't you if you were me?"

Trump said that he'll also be talking about it in his address to the nation, scheduled to be held on Wednesday evening (local time).

"I'll be discussing my disgust with NATO," he said about his speech.

NATO, which includes European countries, the US and Canada, was formed in 1949 and is built on Article 5 of its founding treaty, which pledges that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

President Donald Trump answers questions from reporters after signing an executive order in the Oval Office of the White House on Tuesday —*PTI*

- A US pullout would essentially spell the end of NATO, which has flourished for decades under American leadership.

However, the Iran war faces opposition in European countries and as the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has sent petroleum prices soaring. NATO allies have said they weren't consulted before the US-Israel launched strikes.

But as the Iran war has spread, missiles and drones have been fired toward NATO member Turkey and a British military base on Cyprus, fuelling speculation about what might prompt NATO to trigger its collective security guarantee and come to their rescue.

But the alliance has so far said it would not intervene, as the pact was defensive in nature.

A US pullout would essentially spell the end of NATO, which flourished for decades under American leadership. The US is also the biggest funder of the organisation.

US relations with Europe had soured in recent months over Trump's call for Greenland — a semiautonomous territory NATO ally Denmark — to become part of the US, prompting many EU countries to rally behind Copenhagen. —*Agencies*

HAVE NO TRUST, WON'T NEGOTIATE WITH US: IRAN

TEHRAN, 1 APRIL

Iran's Foreign Minister **Abbas Araghchi** dismissed the possibility of negotiations with Washington, as the "trust level is at zero".

He confirmed that Iran spoke to US envoy Steve Witkoff, but that did not mean that the Islamic Republic and Washington were negotiating.

Araghchi asserted that Tehran sees no "honesty" in US actions and has "never had a good experience from negotiations" with the US government.

"One time, years ago, we negotiated, and we even got a deal, and then the US withdrew without any explanation. And twice last year and now this year, we negotiated with the US, and the result was an attack by them," he said.

Araghchi added that the Strait of Hormuz can become a peaceful waterway, but added that its fate will be decided by Oman and Iran.

'WAITING FOR US FORCES'

Araghchi said that Iran was "waiting" for the US to deploy boots on the ground.

Such a move would be "mistake," he warned. "I don't think they'd dare to do such a thing"."We know how to defend ourselves. In a ground war, we can do it even better," he said. —*Agencies*

UK, 35 nations to host Hormuz summit

LONDON, 1 APRIL

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Wednesday said the UK will host an international diplomatic conference this week on ways to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, while noting that the West Asia conflict was "not our war". Starmer says 35 countries have signed a statement committing to work together on restoring maritime security to the key oil transport route.

"The most effective way we can support the cost of living in Britain is to push for de-escalation in the Middle East, and a reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, which is such a vital route for energy," Starmer said.

He said Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper will lead a conference on the issue, and military planners are also working on plans for security once the Iran war ends.

He also hit back at US President Donald Trump for reportedly considering leaving NATO.

> **Whatever the pressure on me... I'm going to act in the British national interest. And that's why I've been absolutely clear that this is not our war**
>
> — Keir Starmer, British Prime Minister

"Firstly, NATO is the single most effective military alliance the world has ever seen. And it has kept us safe for many decades," Starmer said. "Secondly, whatever the pressure on me... I'm going to act in the British national interest. And that's why I've been absolutely clear that this is not our war, and we're not going to get dragged into it. But I'm equally clear that.. we have to have closer ties with Europe." —*Agencies*

American scribe kidnapped in Baghdad had been warned: US, Iraq

BAGHDAD, 1 APRIL

An American journalist was kidnapped near her hotel in Baghdad, Iraq, on Tuesday. A freelance journalist who has worked for years in Iraq and Syria, **Shelly Renee Kittleson** had been warned of threats against her in the days before her abduction, said US and Iraqi officials.

US believes that she was kidnapped by the Kataib Hezbollah, an Iran-linked militia that has been implicated in previous kidnappings of foreigners, although the group has not claimed responsibly.

An Iraqi official on Wednesday also said that she had tried to cross from Syria into Iraq three weeks earlier and was initially turned back due to security concerns and the lack of a press permit.

One suspect has been arrested after security forces chased the car in which she was abducted. —*PTI*

People stand near a damaged van beside scattered debris following an Israeli strike in Beirut, Lebanon on Wednesday —*PTI*

Lebanese army withdraws from border towns

BEIRUT, 1 APRIL

The Lebanese Army stated that its army had withdrawn from several towns on the border with Israel, as the IDF continues to advance.

The troops had to reposition to prevent being dispersed and cut off from supply lines, the statement said, as Israeli attacks continue "indiscriminately against both military personnel and civilians in different regions".

Israel has said it will control the area south of the Litani river and the 6 lakh people who have evacuated from the border will not be allowed to return until the IDF can attest to the safety of the region.

Meanwhile, Israel bombardment killed at least seven people in Beirut, and several others in different parts of the country. Lebanon's Health Ministry said another 21 people were wounded.

Israel says it invaded its neighbour to dismantle Hezbollah. —*Agencies*

IRAN TO ALLOW 6 B'DESHI FUEL SHIPS TO CROSS HORMUZ

Iran Security Council approved safe passage to Bangladesh's six fuel-carrying ships waiting to cross the Strait of Hormuz. Five LNG shipments from Qatar and one crude oil cargo from Saudi, carrying nearly 5 lakh tonnes of LNG and around 79,000 tonnes of crude oil are waiting to cross the Strait to dock in Bangladesh. Dhaka is dependent on imported fuel and its reserves have been dwindling.

Iran hits oil tanker off Qatar's coast as airstrikes batter Tehran

DUBAI, 1 APRIL

Iran hit an oil tanker off the coast of Qatar and Kuwait's airport on Wednesday while airstrikes battered Tehran.

Qatar's Defence Ministry said a cruise missile slammed into an oil tanker off Qatar's coast on Wednesday. The 21-member crew of the tanker, contracted by state-owned QatarEnergy, was evacuated and no casualties were reported. QatarEnergy said there was no environmental impact from the tanker attack. A fully-loaded Kuwaiti oil tanker came under attack off Dubai the day before. More than 20 ships have been attacked by Iran during the war.

Meanwhile, in the United Arab Emirates, a Bangladeshi national was killed when he was hit by debris from an intercepted drone in Fujairah, one of the country's seven emirates.

Bahrain sounded two alerts for incoming missiles, while Kuwait's state-run KUNA news agency said a drone hit a fuel tank at Kuwait International Airport, sparking a large fire.

Two drones were also intercepted in Saudi Arabia, while Iran claimed to have struck an oil facility in Iraq. An airstrike on Tehran, meanwhile, appeared to have hit the former US Embassy compound, which has been controlled by Iran's Revolutionary Guard since American diplomats were held hostage there in 1979.

Aid worker and a sniffer dog after strikes in Iran —*IRAN RED CRESCENT*

The extent of the damages in Iran was not immediately verifiable. Over 3,000 people have been killed in the war, mainly in Lebanon and Iran.

HOUTHIS FIRE FRESH SALVOS

The Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen said they fired a barrage of ballistic missiles toward Israel. Air raid sirens went off in southern Israel in the early morning, from Beersheba to the Mediterranean coast following the launch.

The entry of the Houthis has raised concerns that they could resume attacks on vessels in the Red Sea further disrupting the global shipping industry and sending oil prices much higher.

'ATTACK TECH COS? WITH WHAT?'

US President Donald Trump laughed at Iran's threat to strike the facilities of 18 US technology companies in the region.

The IRGC said it would attack them on Wednesday night IST.

Claiming to have destroyed Iran's missile capabilities, Trump asked if they would attack the companies with "BB guns?" —*Agencies*

Israel says it struck fentanyl plant in Iran

DUBAI, 1 APRIL

Israel said early on Wednesday that it struck a plant supplying Iran with fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, to allegedly use in a chemical weapons programme. Iran acknowledged the strike on Tofigh Daru factory, but insisted it only supplied "hospital drugs" used in medical operations.

Hospitals extensively use fentanyl to treat severe pain. But a small amount of the drug can be fatal. The strike happened Tuesday, both Israel and Iran said.

Notably, the US classified fentanyl as a Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD) before capturing Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro. WMDs were the pretext for US-led NATO forces to invade Iraq.

Both Israel and the US have warned in recent years Iran was experimenting with fentanyl in munitions. The US has said that Russia likely used a fentanyl derivative during the 2002 Moscow theatre hostage seizure by Chechen militants, and Iran was studying this. —*PTI*

AHEAD OF MIDTERMS

Trump signs order for national voter list

WASHINGTON, 1 APRIL

President Donald Trump on Tuesday signed an executive order creating a nationwide list of verified eligible voters, a move that is sure to draw legal challenges as the president continues to demand further restrictions on voting ahead of this year's midterm elections.

The order calls on the Department of Homeland Security, working in conjunction with the Social Security Administration, to make the list of eligible voters in each state. It also seeks to bar the US Postal Service from sending absentee ballots to those not on state's approved list, although the president likely lacks the power to mandate what the Postal Service does.

Trump is also calling for ballots with secure envelopes with unique barcodes for tracking, according to the executive order, which was first reported by the Daily Caller.

President Donald Trump on Tuesday signed an executive order creating a nationwide list of verified eligible voters —*x*

"I think it's going to be really great," Trump said. Yet Tuesday's order is expected to prompt legal challenges, as the President continues to try to interfere with state-run elections.

Trump's first election executive order in March sought sweeping changes to how elections are run across the country, including adding a documentary proof-of-citizenship requirement to the federal voter registration form and

- David Becker, a former lawyer for the Department of Justice stated, "The Constitution is very clear — the President has no power over elections in the states."

requiring mailed ballots to be received at election offices by Election Day. Much of it has been blocked through legal challenges.

David Becker, former Justice Department lawyer who leads the Center for Election Innovation and Research said, "The Constitution is very clear — the President has no power over elections in the states." —*PTI*

Pak, Afghan and Chinese officials to hold talks

ISLAMABAD, 1 APRIL

Officials from Pakistan, Afghanistan and China are meeting on Wednesday in the Chinese city of Urumqi under the trilateral mechanism, according to a media report.

It is the first high-level interaction between the two warring neighbours since Pakistan declared "open war"with Operation Ghazab lil-Haq against alleged terror hideouts in Afghanistan on 26 February.

A senior Foreign Ministry official said that the meeting is not a "mediation effort per se", according to Dawn.

No major outcomes are expected, though China is pushing for confidence-building measures, such as reopening trade routes, it added.

An official said Beijing requested Pakistan Deputy PM Ishaq Dar, who was in Beijing on Tuesday, for

Islamabad's participation. Kabul sought China's help in bringing Pakistan to table, the official said.

He added that China also has concerns about the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) — a transnational terrorist outfit known to operate in Afghanistan.

He said that Kabul is willing to discuss Pakistan's "key demands". These likely include urging the Taliban administration to prevent the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) from using Afghan territory to launch attacks on Pakistan. —*PTI*

NSE, IGX partner to launch natural gas derivatives

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

National Stock Exchange (NSE) announced its partnership with Indian Gas Exchange Ltd (IGX) on Wednesday to introduce exchange-traded derivatives based on domestic natural gas prices. Under the collaboration approved by market regulator Sebi, the NSE will launch natural gas futures contracts linked to IGX's benchmark price index—the Gas IndeX of India (GIXI)—reflecting pricing based on actual trades on the IGX platform, as part of NSE's push to expand commodity derivatives using domestic benchmarks and evolving market needs. The collaboration aims to provide an efficient risk management tool for stakeholders across the gas value chain, including producers, consumers and market intermediaries, said NSE Chief Business Development Officer Sriram Krishnan —*PTI*

Travomint's parent files confidential IPO papers

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Travomint's parent company, SNVA Traveltech, started the process for an initial public offering (IPO) by filing confidential papers with Sebi. In a public notice on Wednesday, the Noida-based firm said it has filed "the pre-filed draft red herring prospectus with Sebi and the stock exchanges on 30 March." The company has opted for the confidential pre-filing route, allowing the company to engage with Sebi for initial feedback on its draft document without it being publicly disclosed. This route is favoured by companies seeking more flexibility in their IPO preparations and responding to market conditions before a public filing. Founded in 2017, Travomint offers tech-driven travel bookings via web and mobile apps, serving customers in 50 countries.—*PTI*

Coal India arm's production rises 5% in FY26

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Coal India's SECL on Wednesday said it has registered a 5.26 per cent growth in production and a 4.6 per cent increase in dry fuel supplied during 2025-26. SECL recorded a total coal production of 176.2 million tonnes in FY26, up 5.26 per cent from 167.4 MT produced in 2024-25, signalling steady progress amid rising energy demand. The company's coal offtake in FY26 stood at 178.6 million tonnes compared to 170.7 MT in FY25. "SECL has achieved a significant milestone in FY 2025-26, emerging as the only subsidiary of Coal India Limited to register positive growth across all three key performance parameters — coal production, offtake and overburden removal," SECL Chairman-cum-Managing Director Harish Duhan said.—*PTI*

Markets begin FY27 on a high amid war de-escalation hopes

Sensex jumps 1,186.77 points, while Nifty climbs 348 points

MUMBAI, 1 APRIL

Stock markets closed nearly 2 per cent higher on Wednesday, with the Sensex and Nifty rallying in tandem with global peers amid hopes of de-escalation in the West Asia conflict.

Starting the new fiscal year on a high note, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,186.77 points or 1.65 per cent to settle at 73,134.32. During the day, it surged 2,017.03 points or 2.80 per cent to 73,964.58. Snapping its two-day falling streak, the 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 348 points or 1.56 per cent to end at 22,679.40.

A drop in crude oil prices also boosted the market sentiment.

Trent, InterGlobe Aviation, Adani Ports, Bharat Electronics, State Bank of India and Eternal emerged as the major gainers. NTPC, Sun Pharma, Power Grid, UltraTech Cement and Bharti Airtel were the laggards.

US President Donald Trump's remarks that the US could withdraw from Iran "whether we have a deal or not" within the next two to three weeks provided the catalyst markets had been waiting for. Sectorally, BSE Services surged 4.99 per cent, followed by PSU Bank (3.66 per cent), Industrials (3.40 per cent), Capital Goods (3.29 per cent), MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt (3.07 per cent), Consumer Discretionary (2.79 per cent), Commodities (2.72 per cent) and IT (2.40 per cent). BSE Healthcare emerged as the only laggard.

A total of 3,828 stocks advanced while 508 declined and 101 remained unchanged on the BSE. The US market ended significantly higher on 31 March. The Nasdaq Composite index surged 3.83 per cent, S&P 500 jumped 2.91 per cent and Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 2.49 per cent.

Foreign institutional investors offloaded equities worth Rs 11,163.06 crore on 30 March, according to exchange data. Domestic institutional investors, however, bought stocks worth Rs 14,894.72 crore. PTI On 30 March, the Sensex tumbled 1,635.67 points or 2.22 per cent to settle at 71,947.55. The Nifty slumped 488.20 points or 2.14 per cent to end at 22,331.40. —*PTI*

'RELIEF FOR AVIATION SECTOR'

Partial ATF price hike insulates air travel costs: IndiGo

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

IndiGo on Wednesday said the partial hike in aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price will help insulate the domestic air travel costs amid the rise in fuel, while SpiceJet said it would be a significant relied for the aviation industry.

IndiGo said that it was reviewing the impact of this revised ATF price on 1 April on its operating cost and will appropriately announce its revised fuel charges shortly.

PSU oil marketing companies, under the Ministry of Petroleum in consultation with the Ministry of Civil Aviation, decided to implement only a partial and staggered increase of 25 per cent or Rs 15/litre for domestic airlines, Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Naidu said on X.

"The ongoing geopolitical situation in West Asia has significantly affected global supply of (ATF) resulting in continuous and steep increase in its prices," the airline said in the statement.

Meanwhile, SpiceJet chairman and managing director Ajay Singh on Wednesday said the government's decision to allow only a partial increase in ATF prices comes as a significant relief for the Indian aviation industry at a time of unprecedented global uncertainty. Airlines are already incurring higher operational costs due to the airspace restrictions in the West Asia region amid the conflict. The situation is forcing carriers to take longer routes for international flights, resulting in increased fuel burn.

Singh also said the timely intervention will go a long way in helping airlines navigate one of the most challenging global crises in recent times, marked by severe external disruptions and volatility in fuel markets. —*PTI*

US tariffs to moderate India Inc's rating profile in FY26: Agencies

MUMBAI, 1 APRIL

US tariff orders are likely to moderate India Inc's credit profiles in the second half of FY26, and the West Asia conflict, especially its duration, will play a crucial role in determining how it pans out in the future, rating agencies said on Wednesday.

Crisil Ratings, which rates over 7,300 entities, conducted a stress test on the likely impact of the West Asia crisis on Indian companies, which revealed that 23 of the 30 sectors with exposure to the Gulf region will be resilient to the pressure.

The agency's managing director Subodh Rai said that it is very difficult to predict how long the war will last and what the final outcomes will be.

"Corporate India's agility and resilience are being tested again. We remain cautious as the duration and intensity of the West Asia conflict are uncertain. If it prolongs, slower global growth, gas availability challenges, higher-for-longer crude oil prices, and consequently impact on consumer sentiment will bear watching," its senior director Somasekhar Vemuri said.

Fiscal and monetary authorities will respond with some relief measures. —*PTI*

STEEL PRICES RISE

Iran war to hike costs of realty construction by 5%

KOLKATA, 1 APRIL

The escalating West Asia conflict is beginning to exert cost pressure on India's real estate sector, with material prices rising and industry leaders warning of a potential 5 per cent spike in construction costs if hostilities persist through April.

Construction schedules are also likely to be affected because of shortage of materials and resources if the conflict prolongs.

Harshavardhan Neotia, Chairman of Ambuja Neotia Group, said the crisis is triggering a "classic cost-push cycle" for real estate, with crude oil moving from sub-USD70 levels in February to well above USD 110–120 per barrel in March and natural gas witnessing sharp spikes.

Sushil Mohta, President of CREDAI West Bengal and Chairman of Merlin Group, said if the war continues in April, the cost of construction will go up by 5 per cent immediately

On the ground, construction steel prices have already seen a sharp run-up. TMT steel prices surged around 20 per cent in some markets, jumping from approximately Rs 62,000 to Rs 72,000 per tonne between February and March, with broader reports indicating an 18–25 per cent surge over the past 2–3 months, realtors said.

Meanwhile, rating agency ICRA, in its latest outlook on the infrastructure construction sector, flagged that developments in West Asia are key factors pressing on bitumen prices. These prices will weigh on construction companies' operating profitability. —*PTI*

GST collections grow to Rs 2 lakh cr in March

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

GST revenues grew about 9 per cent in March, scaling to the pre-tax cut level of over Rs 2 lakh crore, the third highest monthly collection in the 2025-26 fiscal, buoyed by mop-ups from imports as well as domestic sales and purchases, government data showed on Wednesday.

Gross domestic revenues rose 5.9 per cent to over Rs 1.46 lakh crore, while those from imports grew 17.8 per cent to Rs 53,861 crore during the month.

The gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) mop-up was Rs 1.83 lakh crore in March 2025.

March 2026 saw the third-highest collection in the 2025-26 fiscal (April-March), with April 2025 recording the highest-ever GST revenues at over Rs 2.36 lakh crore, followed by May's collection at over Rs 2.01 lakh crore.

For the full 2025-26 fiscal, GST collections grew 8.3 per cent YoY to over Rs 22.27 lakh crore.

The GST collection dipped in the first month of tax cut implementation, with revenues declining to Rs 1.70 lakh crore in November. It rose to Rs 1.74 lakh crore in December and Rs 1.93 lakh crore in January. In February, it was over Rs 1.83 lakh crore. —*PTI*

India's data centre investment to hit USD 54 billion: CBRE

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

India's data centre segment will continue to attract interest from investors and may see an investment commitment of more than USD 54 billion this year, according to CBRE.

The real estate consultant released a report 'India Alternate Sectors Outlook 2026', stating that India's total data centre stock across major cities is projected to increase by 30 per cent year-on-year in 2026 with an estimated 500 MW of new supply addition.

The asset class witnessed investment commitments of USD 56.4 billion in 2025 alone, bringing the cumulative total to USD 126 billion. The will drive a significant upswing in deployments. —*PTI*

GOLD FUTURES CLIMB TO RS 1.52L/10G

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Gold price climbed Rs 1,539 to Rs 1.52 lakh per 10 gram in futures trade on Wednesday due to bullish sentiment in the domestic market amid rise in precious metal rates globally and a weaker US dollar.

On the Multi Commodity Exchange, the yellow metal for June delivery increased Rs 1,539, or 1.02 per cent, to Rs 1,52,300 per 10 grams from Tuesday's closing level of Rs 1,50,761 per 10 grams.

Analysts said investors turned to safe-haven asset amid uncertainty surrounding the ongoing US-Iran conflict.

In the international market, gold futures for the May contract gained USD 55.35, or 1.18 per cent, to USD 4,733.95 per ounce.

According to analysts, bullion prices witnessed a strong rebound after a volatile March, with prices rising sharply in previous session as the dollar retreated. —*PTI*

Oracle sets severance condition for laid-off employees

TEXAS, 1 APRIL

Just hours after Oracle began its largest-ever round of layoffs, the firm notified its employees that the severance pay would only be received if employees signed the termination letter, said sources.

According to sources, Oracle employees started receiving termination emails around 6am IST on Wednesday, with no prior information, warning or HR calls.

The email stated that the employees have been terminated as part of a bigger organisational restructuring and that the day they read or receive the email was their last working day.

Sources stated that immediately after receiving the email, many employees were locked out of the internal system.

The firm is offering a four-week base salary for first-year staff and an additional one week for every year that comes after, with up to a maximum of 26 weeks.

The layoffs could reach up to 30,000, which is roughly 18 per cent of the firm's total workforce, and save up to USD 8 to 10 billion. The firm aims to fund its Artificial Intelligence centres' expansion—*Agencies*

Adani, Blinkit launch quick commerce at Mumbai airport

MUMBAI, 1 APRIL

Adani Airport Holdings, in partnership with Blinkit, on Wednesday announced the launch of India's first in-terminal quick commerce service at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, Mumbai.

The service is now live at Terminal 2, domestic departures, bringing the app-based delivery directly into the airport experience.

Passengers can receive orders across boarding gates, lounges, the food court, and select partner outlets at the airport after ordering essentials through the Blinkit app and have them delivered to their location within the terminal.

An Adani Airport Holdings Limited (AAHL) spokesperson said: "Bringing app-based convenience into the terminal allows passengers to make better use of their time and raises the overall service standard. This is a step towards building more responsive and passenger-centric airports".

The offering spans across various sections like travel accessories, electronics, snacks, books, baby care and personal essentials. Permissible liquids, such as packaged water, cold beverages and juices are sourced from approved in-terminal inventory, in line with airport security protocols. —*PTI*

UNITS MADE BEFORE 31 MARCH, 2025

Govt extends special one time relief for SEZs

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

The government has announced a one-time special relief measure in the form of certain duty benefits for special economic zones (SEZs) to provide support to units in these enclaves amid global uncertainties.

However, the exemption will be available only if the unit in the SEZ had commenced production of goods on or before 31 March, 2025, the department of revenue said.

They also have to prove that the goods in respect of which benefits of this exemption notification have been claimed, fulfil all the specified conditions.

This notification shall come into force on 1 April.

It added that the goods for which exemption under this notification is claimed should have been manufactured by the unit in the SEZ and should have undergone a minimum value addition of 20 per cent.

In the recent budget, Finance Minister Niramala Sitharaman proposed a special one-time measure, to facilitate sales by eligible manufacturing units in SEZs to the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) at concessional rates of duty.

It was proposed to address the concerns arising about utilisation of capacities by manufacturing units in the SEZs due to global trade disruptions.

Units in SEZs are allowed to sell their products in DTA on payment of import duties.

Krishan Arora, partner and leader, Indirect tax and India Investment Advisory, Grant Thornton Bharat, said the concessional duty ranges from 6.5 per cent to 12.5 per cent across sectors, with reduction in both BCD (basic customs duty) and Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess (AIDC), varying from product to product.

Total exports from these zones rose 7.37 per cent to USD 172.27 billion in 2024-25. There are 276 operational SEZs, with 6,279 units, in the country. —*PTI*

CBI files case against Reliance Com, Anil Ambani

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

The CBI on Wednesday registered a fresh case against **industrialist Anil Ambani** and Reliance Communications Ltd for allegedly causing a loss of Rs 3,750 crore to Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India.

The CBI has filed the case for the alleged offences of conspiracy, cheating and misappropriation and under the provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act on a complaint from the LIC, making it the fourth case against the company and Anil Ambani, they said.

The agency has alleged that LIC was fraudulently induced to subscribe to non convertible debentures (NCDs) worth Rs. 4500 crore between 2009 and 2012 on the basis of false representations made by Reliance Communications Ltd. and its management regarding the financial health of the company, and security and asset cover offered to LIC while subscribing to the NCDs.

The insurer suffered a loss of over Rs 3,750 crore and ordered a forensic audit against the company.

The forensic audit report stated that RCOM had misutilised funds raised from banks and financial institutions, routing of funds through subsidiaries and other anomalies. —*PTI*

-PTI

Weatherald, Doggett handed CA central contracts

MELBOURNE, 1 APRIL

Cricket Australia on Wednesday handed maiden central contracts to opener Jake Weatherald and pacer Brendan Doggett, while all-rounder Glenn Maxwell and opener Sam Konstas were among those dropped ahead of a demanding 2026-2027 season.

Weatherald and Doggett, who both made their Test debuts during the Ashes, were rewarded for their performances, while pacer Michael Neser retained his place after his contributions in the series. Off-spinner Todd Murphy also returned to the list ahead of the five-Test tour of India early next year. Murphy had been drafted into the Test squad during the Ashes following Nathan Lyon's injury.—*PTI*

Bhullar leads strong India line-up in Japan

CHIBA, 1 APRIL

Seasoned golfer Gaganjeet Bhullar will lead a strong Indian challenge at the 2026 International Series beginning here on 2 April. Bhullar, who has been dominant in India on the IGPL Tour, with three wins in 2025 and the opening leg of 2026, will be joined by Karandeep Kochhar, who won an Asian Development Tour event in Egypt, and by legends Jeev Milkha Singh, SSP Chawrasia, and Jyoti Randhawa. Also in the fray is Shaurya Bhattacharya, who had a fine domestic season on the PGTI in India. Ajeetesh Sandhu is a second reserve. No Indian has won on the International Series, and Bhullar, who turns 38 later this month, last won in Indonesia in late 2023.—*PTI*

Vishvanath, Sachin advance to QF of Asian Boxing C'ships

ULAANBAATAR, 1 APRIL

Indian boxers continued their impressive run on day three of the Asian Boxing Championships, with World Cup medallist Sachin Siwach and Vishvanath Suresh advancing to the quarterfinals here on Wednesday. Sachin notched a hard-fought 4-1 split decision win over Mongolia's Bayarkhuu in the 60kg round of 16 bout, maintaining composure in a closely-contested fight to progress to the last eight. He will next face Cheng-Wei Lee of Chinese Taipei. Vishvanath moved into the quarterfinals with a commanding 5-0 unanimous decision over Bekzat Ergeshov of Kyrgyzstan. He delivered a dominant display.—*PTI*

Indian trap shooters fail to reach finals in ISSF World Cup

TANGIER, 1 APRIL

Indian trap shooters failed to reach the finals in both the men's and women's events after two days of qualification rounds at the inaugural ISSF Shotgun World Cup here on Wednesday. Kynan Chenai and Aashima Ahlawat fought hard but missed reaching the finals of the men's and women's trap competitions, respectively, by an identical one-point margin. Kynan shot 119 (24, 24, 24, 24, 23) while Aashima tallied 111 (22, 22, 21, 22, 24), as they bowed out in 13th and 14th spots, respectively. Bhowneesh Mendiratta (23, 24, 25, 20, 23) shot rounds of 20 and 23 in the men's trap to give up his overnight (23, 24, 25) advantage of sixth spot, eventually finishing 39th in the pecking order.—*PTI*

KKR seek spin revival against SRH in home phase

Historically, Eden Gardens has been a stronghold of KKR

KOLKATA, 1 APRIL

Kolkata Knight Riders in action -PTI

Kolkata Knight Riders will be desperate for their spinners to rediscover the bite against Sunrisers Hyderabad in an IPL match involving two batting-heavy sides here on Thursday.

This fixture also marks the start of a crucial home stretch for the three-time champions, who will play three matches in seven days and another on 19 April before the Kolkata leg pauses for nearly a month due to the upcoming assembly polls.

With four away games to follow and their next home fixture scheduled only on May 16, KKR know it is imperative to build momentum in this phase.

Historically, Eden Gardens has been a stronghold of KKR, winning 54 out of 95 matches since 2008. However, KKR's start has already hit a few early bumps, as expected with their thin bowling resources.

They seemed to have assembled a well-rounded pace attack, but injuries and availability issues had blunted their firepower.

Harshit Rana and Akash Deep are ruled out, Matheesha Pathirana is yet to get an NOC from Sri Lanka Cricket, and Cameron Green, their Rs 25.20 crore overseas acquisition, is currently available only as a batter. That lack of depth was brutally exposed in their opener against the Mumbai Indians, where they failed to defend 220.

Rohit Sharma and Ryan Rickelton put on a 148-run opening stand in just 72 balls, underlining KKR's lack of penetration with the new ball.

But the bigger worry will be the struggle of spinners Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy.

Chakravarthy went wicketless and conceded 48 runs, continuing his profligate ways since the latter part of the T20 World Cup, while Narine bowled just three overs and was introduced only after the Powerplay. Green, who made 18 off 10 balls, did not bowl because of his workload management instructions given by Cricket Australia.

With Green not being used as a bowler, it remains to be seen if KKR are tempted to bring in Rovman Powell, given the West Indian's proven T20 credentials. The match starts at 7.30 pm. —*PTI*

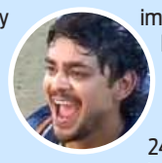
ABHISHEK AND KISHAN STAY 1-2 IN ICC T20I RANKINGS

Swashbuckling India batters Abhishek Sharma and Ishan Kishan retained the top two spots in the latest ICC T20I player rankings released on Wednesday.

Abhishek leads the chart with 875 points, followed closely by Kishan at 871. They are joined in the top 10 by Tilak Varma, who is placed sixth, and India T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav is in seventh position.

Veteran England wicketkeeper batter Jos Buttler (up one place to eighth) and New Zealand's Tim Seifert (down one spot to ninth) are the only players within the top 20 to register movement this week.

South African batter Connor Esterhuizen has continued his recent rise by making giant strides.



Esterhuizen made an immediate impact when commencing his international career during South Africa's recent T20I series in New Zealand, with the 24-year-old amassing a total of 200 runs to be adjudged the Player of the Series.

OPENING LOSS TO PBKS

Wasn't an easy wicket, conditions make a big difference: Patel

MULLANPU, 1 APRIL

It wasn't an easy wicket to bat on, said Gujarat Titans assistant coach Parthiv Patel on Wednesday, citing the challenging pitch as the primary reason for his team's three-wicket loss to Punjab Kings in their IPL opener here.

Punjab Kings chased a 163-run target with five balls to spare on Tuesday.

"As a team, you want them to fight. I am happy that we took the game to the last over," Patel said in the post-match press conference.

"It wasn't the easiest wicket to bat on. It's been raining here for the last three to four days, and the groundsmen did a really good job preparing the wicket. Once the ball was old, it was reversing a bit, and it was also holding up a bit. After the power play, batting wasn't easy," he explained.

However, Patel also stated that the difficult pitch does not take away credit from the effort of Punjab's bowlers.

Senior spinner Yuzvendra Chahal (2/28) and seamer Vijaykumar Vyashak (3/34) kept things tight to restrict Gujarat to a relatively modest total before young Australian southpaw Cooper Connolly marked his IPL debut with a decisive 44-ball 72 to steer the home side past the finishing line.

"As I said, the Punjab bowlers, the way they bowled in the final overs, they bowled cleverly towards the end," Patel said.

Elaborating on what went wrong for the Shubman Gill-led side, Patel said conditions played a major role. "The match went to the 20th over. —*PTI*

Iyer fined ₹ 12 lakh for slow over-rate

Punjab Kings captain Shreyas Iyer was fined Rs 12 lakh after his team maintained a slow over-rate during their IPL match against the Gujarat Titans here. Punjab Kings defeated GT by three wickets to start their IPL 2026 campaign on a winning note.

"As this was his team's first offence of the season under Article 2.22 of the IPL's Code of Conduct, which pertains to minimum over-rate offences, Iyer was fined INR 12 lakhs," stated a media release.

Pacer Vyshak Vijayakumar and leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal shared five wickets among them as PBKS limited GT to 162 for six. espite a stuttering batting effort, Punjab went past the line in 19.1 overs.

KARNATAKA LEADS IN KITG

Talawar, Nagini clinch gold medals

RAIPUR, 1 APRIL

Race walker Dasharath Talawar and middle-distance runner Nagini added a gold medal each to table toppers Karnataka's tally, while Chhattisgarh's Gajendra Thakur bagged a silver in the men's 800m on Day 8 of the Khelo India Tribal Games here on Wednesday.

Dasharath led Karnataka's 1-2 in the men's 10km race walk with a time of 45:13.85s, with Darshan Bagadi (46:25.90s) finishing second ahead of Gujarat's Sagarbhai Katara (48:16.09s) at the Kreeda Parisar athletics track in Jagdalpur.

Nagini then dominated the women's 800m race to clinch the gold with a time of 2:13.80s to take Karnataka's gold medal tally to 21.

Karnataka has also bagged eight silver and seven bronze for an aggregate of 36 medals.

Chhattisgarh's Gajendra Thakur claimed the men's 800m silver medal with a timing of 1:53.82s behind Munda, who clocked 1:53.33s.

Earlier, Chhattisgarh men's hockey team clinched the bronze medal by beating neighbouring Madhya Pradesh 14-6. The two medals took their tally to two gold, eight silver and five bronze and are placed 10th in the overall standings.

With just one day of track and field competitions left, second-placed Odisha continued to chase the table toppers with four gold on Wednesday to take their overall tally to 17 gold, 10 silver and 16 bronze medals. —*PTI*

FIDE Chess: Praggnanandhaa played out a draw

CYPRUS, 1 APRIL

India's R. Praggnanandhaa played out a draw with Germany's Matthias Bluebaum in just 37 moves in the fourth round of the FIDE Candidates Tournament 2026 in Cyprus on Wednesday.

Currently, the Grandmaster from Tamil Nadu takes his tally to 2 points a day after he lost to Uzbekistan's Javokhir Sindarov.

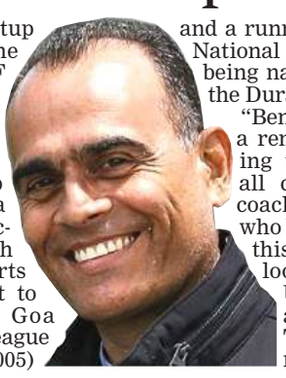
Praggnanandhaa had beaten Dutch GM Anish Giri in the first round with white pieces, before playing out a draw with China's Wei Yi in the second round with black. —*PTI*

Medeira joins Bengaluru FC as head of youth development

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Bengaluru FC on Wednesday appointed former India men's team head coach Savio Medeira as the club's Head of Youth Development.

Medeira arrives in Bengaluru with over two decades of experience in coaching, technical development, and coach education across Indian and international football. He has previously served as the India head coach and assistant coach, and was part of the setup that won the SAFF Championship (2011), Nehru Cup, and AFC Challenge Cup.



At the club level, Medeira enjoyed a successful spell with Salgaocar Sports Club, leading it to multiple Goa Professional League titles (2002–2005) and a runner-up finish in the National League, while also being named Best Coach at the Durand Cup (2003).

"Bengaluru FC has done a remarkable job building this pathway, and all credit goes to the coaches and everyone who has worked to make this possible. When I look at where the U14s, U16s, U18s, and the Reserve Team are right now. —*PTI*

CHELSEA ANNOUNCES PL-RECORD LOSSES OF $350M

LONDON, 1 APRIL

Chelsea made pre-tax losses of 262.4 million pounds ($350 million) in its latest financial results, the club announced Wednesday, a record high in the Premier League era.

Chelsea, whose owners are from U.S. private equity, attributed the losses in part to "increased operating costs" in 2024-25 compared to the previous year.

The previous highest recorded pre-tax loss in the Premier League was the 197.5 million pounds (now $263 million) posted by Manchester City for the 2010-11 season, Britain's Press Association reported.

Revenue for the year ending June 30, 2025, was 490.9 million pounds ($650 million), Chelsea said — the second-highest on record for the London club. That included some of the money earned from its title-winning run at the Club World Cup. —*PTI*

Sports alphabet booklets launched in 21 languages

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

In a unique multilingual initiative to develop sports culture in India, the "Sports Alphabet Booklets" were released simultaneously in 21 languages in a first-of-its-kind event here on Wednesday.

Developed by sports researcher Dr. Kanishka Pandey under the aegis of "Sports: A Way of Life", the booklets aim to integrate sports with early education by using the alphabet to introduce children to sporting concepts. Dr. Pandey said just as alphabet learning is the first step in generating a child's interest in education, similarly, sports alphabets can become the first step in developing an interest in sports among children. These booklets offer a dual benefit while children learn letters and reading, they simultaneously develop a connection with sports. —*PTI*

Football: India face tough Japan test in U-20 Women's AC

PATHUM THANI, 1 APRIL

The Indian Under-20 women's side will hope to secure an elusive FIFA World Cup berth when it begins its AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup campaign against six-time champions Japan, here on Thursday.

It was earlier last month that their senior counterparts were knocked out of the group stage of the Asian Cup, ending their World Cup qualifying hopes as they finished at the bottom of the group.

But the U-20 side coached by astute tactician Joakim Alexandersson has arrived here with confidence.

The Young Tigresses have returned to the continental stage after a 20-year gap, having qualified for the tournament by topping their group in the qualifiers in August last year. Their previous appearance came in 2006, where they exited in the group stage.

For India, this marks the start of a challenging but significant campaign, with a place in the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup Poland 2026 on the line.

India is placed in a tough Group C alongside Japan, Australia (5 April), and Chinese Taipei (8 April). The top two teams, along with the two best third-placed sides across three groups. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

TEARS, DESPAIR

Italy misses out on FIFA WC qualification again

ROME, 1 APRIL

Italy was beaten by Bosnia in a FIFA World Cup qualifier X/@ITALY

Italy's collapse in the qualification campaign has left the footballing world stunned, with images of distraught players and inconsolable fans painting a picture of heartbreak that transcends sporting boundaries.

The catastrophe unfolded for Italy as they took on Bosnia and Herzegovina in Tuesday's night breathless qualification play-off final.

The Azzurri blew their chance to reach this summer's tournament in North America with a 4-1 penalty shoot-out defeat.

Italy, once synonymous with defensive mastery and tournament pedigree, faltered when it mattered most, unable to summon the grit and tactical clarity that have defined its greatest triumphs.

A front-page editorial in the Gazzetta dello Sport on Wednesday labeled the latest ouster "The third apocalypse," noting "there's no longer a feeling of shock or an unexpected catastrophe. It's becoming the norm."

What makes this setback so surreal is the comparison between Italy's recent European Championship glory and their repeated inability to navigate World Cup qualification.

The despair in the stands, the disbelief among pundits, and the raw emotion on the pitch underline a crisis of identity: how can a team capable of continental brilliance stumble so dramatically on the global stage? —*PTI*

Iraq beats Bolivia to claim final place at 2026 WC

MONTERREY, 1 APRIL

Iraq overcame major logistical issues to become the 48th and final team to secure a spot at the 2026 World Cup with a 2-1 win over Bolivia in an intercontinental playoff Tuesday, ending a wait of four decades to return to soccer's marquee global event.

Ali Almahadi opened the scoring in the 18th minute, Moises Paniagua tied it for Bolivia in the 38th, and Aymen Hussein scored the clincher in the 53rd minute for Iraq. The Iraq team will join Group I along with France, Norway, and Senegal.

"We have nothing to lose, let's try to shock the world with a crazy result and performance. It is great that we qualified," Iraq coach Graham Arnold said. "It is a privilege for us."

Arnold, who guided Australia at the 2022 World Cup, said he didn't think his Iraqi players had faced the likes of France star Kylian Mbappe or Norway's Erling Haaland. "It will be an honor. We respect those players and what they do, but we will try to win. —*PTI*